

Evaluation of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorships

Prepared by: Kathleen O'Connell and Jennifer Sheridan

April 10, 2006

This report details the outcomes for the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, funded by the Estate of William F. Vilas. We present this report in three sections:

Section I: Administrative details of the program.

Section II: The significance of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorships on the UW faculty recipient's professional lives, as well as consequential impact on the University.

Section III: Research progress of the first eight recipients.

Section I: Administrative Details.

The Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) was informed by the Office of the Provost in Spring 2005 that the Trustees of the Estate of William F. Vilas had generously agreed to fund WISELI's Life Cycle Research Grant program for 2005/06. The total amount of the funding was to be \$310,000, and all faculty and permanent principal investigators, regardless of divisional affiliation, were to be eligible for these funds. Per the stipulations of the Estate, no Vilas funds were to be used for salary and individual awards were not to exceed \$30,000. In addition, all awardees are vetted with the Office of the Provost prior to establishing an award in order to ensure that each recipient is in good standing with the University. The Life Cycle Research Grant program was renamed the *Vilas Life Cycle Professorship* program in April 2005.

The Office of the Provost entrusted the administration of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program to WISELI. WISELI's executive director, Jennifer Sheridan, formed a panel of faculty and academic staff to review applications and make funding decisions. For 2005/06, the participants on this panel include:

- **Jennifer Sheridan.** An assistant scientist and a sociologist by training, Dr. Sheridan represents the social studies division. Dr. Sheridan has administered the original Life Cycle Research Grant program since its inception, as well as serving on the review panel from the beginning.
- **Amy Wendt.** A professor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department, Dr. Wendt represents the physical sciences division. Dr. Wendt has served on the review panel of the former Life Cycle Research Grant program since its inception.
- **Cecilia Ford.** Dr. Ford is a professor of English, and represents the arts & humanities division. Dr. Ford has also served on the review panel for the original Life Cycle Research Grant program since the beginning.
- **Nancy Mathews.** Dr. Mathews is an Associate Professor in the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, and represents the biological sciences division. Dr. Mathews is herself a former recipient of the original Life Cycle Research Grant program.

Because flexibility is of utmost importance to faculty who are experiencing life crises, we established three deadlines for applications for the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program for 2005/06:

- **Round 1.** Deadline May 27, 2005. Applications received: 11. Total amount requested: \$285,356. Applications funded: 8 (with three deferred to Round 2). Total amount awarded: \$146,523.
- **Round 2.** Deadline September 30, 2005. Applications received: 8. Total amount requested: \$227,891. Applications funded: 5 (including three from Round 1; two applications were deferred to Round 3). Total amount awarded: \$117,957 (\$23,350 of this sum will be spent in the 2006/07 academic year should the Estate fund another year of awards.)
- **Round 3.** Deadline December 31, 2005. Applications received: 8. Total amount requested: \$211,967. Applications funded: 6 (including two from Round 2.) Total amount awarded: \$145,926 (\$77,056 of this sum will be spent in the 2006/07 academic year should the Estate fund another year of awards.)

- **SUMMARY, 2005/06:** Applications received: 27. Total amount requested: \$725,214. Applications funded: 18. Total amount awarded: \$410,406 (\$100,406 of this sum will be spent in the 2006/07 academic year should the Estate fund another year of awards.)

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants and recipients are very diverse:

	Applicants	Recipients
Gender		
Female	18	13
Male	9	5
Race/Ethnicity*		
Faculty of Color	8	5
Majority Faculty	19	13
Title		
Assistant Professor	5	4
Associate Professor	7	5
Professor	15	9
Division		
Biological Sciences	8	6
Physical Sciences	6	3
Social Studies	8	6
Arts & Humanities	5	3

* Faculty of Color are those identifying as Black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic; all others are Majority Faculty.

Only the first eight recipients, who began their awards prior to the end of 2005, have had enough time to accomplish significant reportable results. The following two sections of this report summarize data provided by these first eight recipients regarding their experiences and their research progress. Only one of these recipients has actually completed the funding cycle for their award; most of the first eight recipients will not finish until August 2006. Should the Estate continue to fund this program, subsequent reports to the Trustees of the Estate of William F. Vilas will include experience and research progress data for all recipients of the previous academic year (e.g., the report we will provide in Spring 2007 will include data from all 18

recipients from the 2005/06 academic year); this report is truncated due to the newness of the program.

Section II: Experiences of Vilas Life Cycle Professors

The experiences of the first eight recipients of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorships awarded in Round 1 are summarized in this section. Awardees were asked to complete an email questionnaire regarding their experiences with the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program, and to report their research progress. Participants' names are removed from Section II to protect the privacy of the individuals. Participants' names are provided in Section III, where research results are reported.

Care for a chronically ill child, tending to the needs of an ailing parent, surgery, divorce, and coping with the effects of a cancer diagnosis and treatment are the types of life-events that faculty have endured while being supported by the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program. This program, as evidenced below, has had positive impacts for the recipients, the people around them, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The following five themes and corresponding quotes reflect how this Professorship has impacted the recipients both professionally and personally.

The Only Grant of its Kind

Participants were quick to describe the significance of this grant and how it uniquely assists in balancing their personal and professional lives. Irene¹ shares the impact this grant had on her life:

“Given the stage in my career, this program was the second most important during my cancer and its aftermath. I say second only because the assistance of my department came at the height of the crisis. This program, however, made it possible for me to regain the momentum of my research. Though there are other grants and professorships offered at the UW, none takes into consideration these circumstances.”

Beth is a single parent caring for two children with special needs:

“I think my tenure application was at risk because the pace of my scholarship was slowed down. The combination of this grant and an extension of my tenure clock have made a tremendous difference in my scholarship quantity and quality.”

It Came at a Critical Juncture in their Personal and Professional Lives

Several of the recipients described how the timing of the grant significantly helped them stay focused on their research. Phyllis shares:

“I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Treatments took about a year and I was still not my normal energetic self for another year thereafter. The consequences of my slowing down in the productivity of my lab followed with a delay. Fortunately, several very good people came to work with me soon thereafter. My problem was that those people cost money and I overspent my grant. Now my lab is full and lively. I have worked on four manuscripts since January. I am no longer overspent. Without having kept my productivity reasonably high, I would have had no

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

chance of having my grant renewed when it came up for renewal. The grant helped me regain my momentum before it was too late.”

Irene explains how the grant helped her stay on track following her cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment:

“I had planned to use academic year 2004-05 to complete a book manuscript and undertake the basic research for my next project. Due to my recovery time, I was able to complete the manuscript, but not conduct the research I needed before preparing grant applications to underwrite the next project. With the Professorships fund, I was able to hire and direct a project assistant who has conducted some of the foundational research for the project. Without the grant and the project assistant it hired, I would have been able to only begin my research and would be several years behind on the project.”

The Grant Provided Psychological Support

This grant overwhelmingly made recipients feel valued and supported by the university, as Don explains:

“I feel the grant is very highly valued. Personally, I see it as a great positive source of assistance to faculty who have undergone life circumstances which have hampered or diffused their research efforts. It demonstrates that the UW-Madison indeed does have a ‘heart.’”

Beth agrees:

“I think emotionally I feel the University is supportive of faculty who may be having challenges that are unique, and I feel supported.”

Impacts on Others’ Lives, as Well

The faculty also discussed how the grant not only helped to support them, but also supported those around them. This may have indirectly included their own families, but directly encompassed the staff and students assigned to their projects or laboratories. Laura is one of several individuals who referred to the grant money contributing to their “survival and success.”

“The support of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program was instrumental in our survival and success. It allowed me to support the necessary staff required to obtain preliminary data and to publish our recent paper.”

Beth also addressed the potential impact of this grant on diverse faculty members:

“ I think this Professorship is extremely valuable. I also think it is important in the retention of women, faculty of color and faculty who come from low income backgrounds who may be more likely to have family responsibilities and distractions that keep them from tenure.”

An Investment in the Grantees’ Futures and the University’s

Faculty reflected on how the impact of the grant not only aided them during a particularly difficult time, but also over the long-term, helping to maintain and promote the mission of the University. Phyllis recounts:

“The grant kept me at the university as a productive and federally supported faculty member with a strong research program. Without the grant, the risk was high that I could not have sustained our program.”

She continues:

“I strongly think that the university benefits from the grant I received. In the current political climate, obtaining federal funding for the { } sciences is extraordinarily competitive (one in ten grants are getting funded at present). A relatively small amount of money, at a time when it helped substantially for me to regain my competitive edge will, I hope, keep me in a pool of faculty that can support research programs.”

Irene and Laura respectively share their open enthusiasm for the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program:

“I have spoken glowingly of the program to others, both at the UW and at other institutions. It is very impressive.”

“This is a wonderful program! Support for us financially for the goals that you (the university) support: publications, grants, promotions and support for students, post docs and staff in the laboratory. This is terrific!”

Section III: Research Progress of Vilas Life Cycle Professors

The following table reflects the number of publications, presentations, and proposals that the recipients of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorships Program have directly attributed to their Vilas Life Cycle Professorship. Please note that the grantees acknowledge they are currently early in the funding cycle, and that the numbers presented for publications, presentations and grants may not depict all of their work in progress. All have eagerly volunteered to provide updates on their momentum and eventual productivity.

Grantee Information about Publications, Presentations, and Grant Proposals

Grantee	Number of Publications	Number of Presentations	Number of Grant Proposals
1	1	3	1
2	1	2	1
3	2	1	0
4	0	0	0
5	3	1	2
6	3	1	1
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
TOTALS	10	8	5