

Evaluation of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program

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This report details the administrative process and outcomes for the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship (VLCP) program and recipients at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, funded by the Estate of William F. Vilas. The report is presented to the Vilas Trustees and the Office of the Provost in three sections:

- Section I:** Administrative details of the program for current year.
- Section II:** Experiences and outcomes of VLCP recipient from previous year.
- Section III:** Progress and highlights of recipient's scholarship and productivity.¹

Section I: Administrative Details

The Vilas Life Cycle Professorship (VLCP) program is administered by the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI), as authorized by the Office of the Provost and with Vilas Trust support from 2005 to 2009. In 2009/10, the Vilas Trustees were unable to fund this program. The Vice Chancellor for Administration agreed to fund the remainder of awards from 2008/09 that would have been funded by the Vilas Trust if there had been a 2009/10 allocation (for a total of \$96,995). WISELI was able to continue implementing the program and make new awards in 2009/10 because (1) the Graduate School was able to fund a very limited number of especially critical proposals, and (2) WISELI had some gift funds that could be used for an award. All faculty and permanent principal investigators, regardless of divisional affiliation, are eligible for these funds. In anticipation of future Vilas funding as the economy improves, the name of the program remained the same, as well as the conditions of the awards: per the stipulations of the Estate, no Vilas funds are to be used for the recipient's salary and individual awards are not to exceed \$30,000. In addition, all applicants selected by the Review Panel 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.

Review Panel

WISELI has enlisted the following faculty/staff to read applications and make funding decisions:

- **Jennifer Sheridan.** An associate scientist and a sociologist by training, Dr. Sheridan represents the Social Studies Division. Dr. Sheridan has administered the original Life Cycle Research Grant (LCRG) program since its inception in 2002, as well as serving on the VLCP panel since the Vilas Trust began funding the awards in 2005.
- **Amy Wendt.** A professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Dr. Wendt represents the Physical Sciences Division. Dr. Wendt has served on the review panel of the former LCRG program since its inception.
- **Jane Zuengler.** Dr. Zuengler is a professor of English, and represents the Arts & Humanities Division. Dr. Zuengler replaced Dr. Cecilia Ford on the review panel in 2007.

¹ To maintain anonymity, the public will have access to Sections I and II only.

- **Nancy Mathews.** Dr. Mathews is a Professor in the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, and represents the Biological Sciences Division. Dr. Mathews is a former recipient of the original LCRG program.

Applicants and Awards

Because flexibility is of utmost importance to faculty who are experiencing life crises, we established three deadlines for applications for the VLCP program for 2009/10.

- **Round 1.** Deadline May 29, 2009. Applications received: 4. Total amount requested: \$113,075. Applications funded: 2 (Graduate School). Total amount awarded: \$56,904.
- **Round 2.** Deadline October 9, 2009. Applications received: 4. Total amount requested: \$100,845. Applications funded: 1 (Graduate School). Total amount awarded: \$29,156.
- **Round 3.** Deadline January 1, 2010. Applications received: 7 (one applicant re-applied after being declined in Round 1). Total amount requested: \$181,157. Applications funded: 3 (Graduate School, Recipient Department, and WISELI). Total amount awarded: \$76,485.

• **SUMMARY, 2009/10:** Applications received: 15. Total amount requested: \$395,077. Applications funded: 7. Total amount awarded: \$162,545.

Recipient Demographics

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants are very diverse:

	Applicants	Recipients²
Gender		
Female	11	7
Male	3	0
Race/Ethnicity³		
Faculty of Color	4	0
Majority Faculty	10	7
Title		
Assistant Professor	5	2
Associate Professor	5	1
Professor	3	3
Permanent PI/Academic Staff	1	1

² One recipient applied twice, and is only included once in this table.

³ Faculty of Color are those whose “heritage code” is listed as Black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic in University records. Majority Faculty are listed as “Other.”

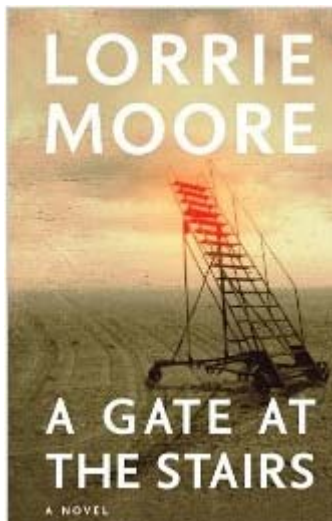
Division		
Biological Sciences	6	2
Physical Sciences	1	1
Social Studies	2	1
Arts & Humanities	5	3

Issues Arising in 2009/10

Because of the limited funding for 2009/10, the selection committee only pursued funding for the most critical of applications; there were several applications we would have liked to have funded but were unable to. For the few cases we selected, the Graduate School was able to offer some critical awards this 2009/10 year; however, it is unlikely that they will be able to continue this practice because the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program and the WARF funding provided by the Graduate School do not have perfectly aligned goals. Likewise, WISELI used all of the discretionary funds we had available towards this program in 2009/10 and has no more extra funds to use towards a Life Cycle grant. Resumption of Vilas Trust funding for 2010/11 will allow us to keep this program going. The need has clearly not diminished; we received more fundable applications than we were able to accommodate in 2009/10, and have already received five inquiries from faculty in 2010, hoping to apply this spring.

Credit Given to the VLCP Program

UW-Madison faculty member and nationally-acclaimed writer Lorrie Moore was a previous recipient of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program. Her new book, *A Gate at the Stairs*, was released in September, 2009. In the acknowledgements section, Prof. Moore thanks the “WISELI/Vilas program,” referring to the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program administered by WISELI.



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Acknowledgments

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Section II: Recipient Outcomes and Experiences

Similar to previous years' recipients, the VLCP grantees expressed gratitude for the funds that this program provided them. They acknowledged that the funds provided them the means to remain productive in their research and in their ongoing roles as faculty and staff at UW-Madison.

All of the recipients who participated in the evaluation of the 2008/09 VLCP funding cycle ($n=11$) identified their own or a family member's illness as the primary reason for applying for the funds. Besides the diagnoses or life-threatening illnesses described, the grantees were also in the midst of a critical juncture in their career—at the very beginning, in which tenure was at issue, or in the middle or later stages, where maintaining a lab and/or their position was at stake. For all, the funds were necessary to establish and/or maintain their careers.

How the Funds Were Used

The majority of the participants (approximately 90%) used the funds to either hire or retain current personnel to help them with their research. This was especially the case for the faculty and staff in the sciences. The recipients from social sciences and the humanities noted that they used the money to support their scholarship, such as editing a book, conducting literature reviews or transcribing, and not necessarily to hire people to replace or perform work that they themselves were unable to do.

Differences in the use of the funds were also seen between academic staff and faculty. For example, academic staff who rely on “soft” or grant money to maintain their positions hoped they could use the funds for salary, because “the academic staff side is different from...the faculty arena.” One grantee suggested that staff should not be “subject to this particular constraint” because she is paid differently from her faculty peers. Despite this concern, the funds helped her to “increase [her] reputation and skills... and attract other dollars that kept [her] research going.”

The VLCP Serves to Retain and Support Personnel

One-third of the recipients reported that they were at risk of leaving the UW and would have done so had they not received the VLCP grant. The other recipients, although not planning to leave, did acknowledge that their professional futures were at risk due to their life event. One recipient did leave the UW, and noted that he did so for an “advancement opportunity,” which was unrelated to the VLCP.

At least ten other people were affected by this current funding cycle of grants. This mix of graduate students, academic staff and post doctoral researchers were hired or retained to perform the work that the recipients needed help with or were physically unable to do. Consequently, these personnel became the “unintended,” yet additional beneficiaries. Comments related to this “value added” outcome include:

I am not sure at all how it is perceived by my colleagues, or even how much they are aware of it, but they were happy that we could fund a very deserving graduate student.

My research assistant was VERY grateful not only for the payment, but also for the health insurance.

[The grant] permitted me to continue funding some of my research team staff. It kept them involved and enhanced their skills, thereby strengthening the team as a whole.

The grant allowed me to keep employment of my lab manager, who helped me run the lab and allowed me to focus on writing grants.

The grant supported the research of a graduate student working with me, who won a funded post-doc position to continue working on the data.

The grant enabled me to hire a research assistant and resurrect my research program. Without the funds, it would have taken me many more years to rekindle my research and gain the funds to support it. Given my age and career stage, I fear that I would have been unable to ever regain my former scholarly momentum.

For junior faculty, the grant supported burgeoning careers, ones which had barely started before being sidetracked by illnesses. An example:

The Vilas grant was invaluable because it allowed me to hire an individual who was able to keep my research program moving during my absence. This continued progress was essential because now I am in the process of renewing a major grant; without the Vilas support, there would not have been adequate progress to make my renewal application competitive. Moreover, I am soon to be reviewed for tenure. Without Vilas support, my packet would not have had enough progress to be competitive. There is a good change that without a feasible tenure packet, I would have lost my job.

View of the VLCP Program

Overall, the VLCP program is viewed very positively. Most of the recipients shared the receipt of this grant with their colleagues, while others kept it confidential due to the sensitive nature of theirs or their family members' illnesses. At the same time, they raved about its effects while completing their evaluation form:

For this senior faculty member, this program was a godsend. There is nothing comparable to it on campus. For a relatively small investment, I believe the payoff to my career trajectory and productivity has been substantial.

This program is huge. It is actually a humanist commitment to faculty life.

When asked where the program falls in terms of its value on campus, two of the recipients noted:

The program occupies a unique niche because it is the only one (to my knowledge) that specifically addresses unexpected adverse life events that can (and do) impede a faculty member's progress. It is absolutely essential for the many faculty who have significant responsibilities outside of their research programs.

It is extremely valuable for those in need in terms of acknowledging faculty needs outside the box (e.g., emotional needs, practical needs involving family). It makes an attempt to legitimize these things in an environment where any weakness is seen as potentially damaging.

Similar to previous years' recipients, they thanked "the UW" and attributed this program to the administration.

The highest value. It is critical to support faculty during crisis. They will return the loyalty tenfold.

The life event took the wind out of my sails so to speak and the funds helped me to feel a bit more valued by UW.

As seen in the next section, the faculty and staff members who received the grants were able to continue their research programs and many applied for and received continued funding from other sources. They also completed books, publications, and other forms of scholarship consistent to their fields of study.

Section III: Research Progress and Scholarship Highlights

Section III has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the VLCP recipients.