

# Evaluation of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program

Christine Maidl Pribbenow and Jennifer Sheridan

April 15, 2011

---

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 recipients from previous year.

**Section III:** Progress and highlights of recipient's scholarship and productivity.<sup>1</sup>

## 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. The Vilas Trustees generously awarded \$300,000 for the program in 2010/11, after a hiatus for the 2009/10 academic year. All faculty and permanent principal investigators, regardless of divisional affiliation, are eligible for these funds. 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 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.

### 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 Associate Chair of the department, and represents the Arts & Humanities Division. Dr. Zuengler replaced Dr. Cecilia Ford on the review panel in 2007.
- **Nancy Mathews.** Dr. Mathews is a Professor in the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, and represents the Biological Sciences Division. She became Director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service in 2010. Dr. Mathews is a former recipient of the original LCRG program.

### Applicants and Awards

---

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

Because flexibility is of utmost importance to faculty who are experiencing life crises, we established three deadlines for applications for the VLCP program for 2010/11.

- **Round 1.** Deadline May 28, 2010. Applications received: 13. Total amount requested: \$333,284. Applications funded: 8. Total amount awarded: \$203,849 (\$8,355 of this sum will be spent in the 2011/12 academic year.)
- **Round 2.** Deadline October 1, 2010. Applications received: 7 new and 2 reapplications. Total amount requested: \$159,888 (not including reapplications.) Applications funded: 6. Total amount awarded: \$100,288 (\$37,643 of this sum will be spent in the 2011/12 academic year.)
- **Round 3.** Deadline December 29, 2010. Applications received: 7 new and 1 reapplication. Total amount requested: \$209,276 (not including reapplication.) Applications funded: 4. Total amount awarded: \$116,725 (\$86,750 of this sum will be spent in the 2011/12 academic year.)

• **SUMMARY, 2010/11:** Applications received: 27 (plus 3 reapplications). Total amount requested: \$702,448 (does not include the 3 reapplications). Applications funded: 18. Total amount awarded: \$420,862 (\$132,748 of this sum will be spent in the 2010/11 academic year.)

Recipient Demographics

Demographically, Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants are very diverse:

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Recipients<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	18	12
Male	9	6
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup></b>		
Faculty of Color	4	2
Majority Faculty	23	16
<b>Title</b>		
Assistant Professor	9	8
Associate Professor	7	4
Professor	10	5
Permanent PI/Academic Staff	1	1

<sup>2</sup> One recipient applied twice, and is only included once in this table.

<sup>3</sup> 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.”

<b>Division</b>		
Biological Sciences	11	6
Physical Sciences	2	2
Social Studies	9	7
Arts & Humanities	5	3

### Issues Arising in 2010/11

One faculty applicant in 2010/11 had a very pressing need for a course release. Because the Vilas Trust funds cannot be used for faculty salary or to pay for the course release, WISELI used \$10,000 of our own funds towards the faculty member's course release, and the department paid for the other half. The faculty member also received a token amount from the Vilas Trust towards research travel and supplies.

### Issues Under Consideration for 2011/12

Remarkably, the 2011/12 academic year is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year (including the former "Life Cycle Research Grant" program pilot program.) We will be looking for ways to publicize the program and the incredible things it has accomplished over the coming year.

Also in 2011/12, we are looking for a replacement for Dr. Nancy Mathews on the review panel. Dr. Mathews will stay until a replacement is found, but her new duties as Director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service has made it more difficult for her to devote the time to this program that she would like.

## **Section II: Recipient Experiences and Outcomes**

For the year 2009-2010, eleven UW-Madison faculty members were recipients of the VLCP grant. Of this cohort, eight are female and three are male. At the time, three were Assistant Professors, two were Associate Professors, and six were Full Professors (two were promoted since receiving the grant). These faculty are very similar to those who have received funds in the past and used them as a bridge during a personal crisis that significantly affected them professionally. The next two sections identify the numerous positive outcomes, including typical measures of productivity (see Section III), that they directly attribute to the grant.

### Use of the Funds

The majority of faculty used the funds to *hire or retain staff*, which includes undergraduate and graduate students, and academic staff. Similar to previous years' findings, it is important to note that this program's effects reach far beyond the original recipient. Many individuals are positively affected and are provided support because of the program. When asked about consequences, one researcher noted:

*The funds allowed me to retain my lab manager, which in turn allowed me to continue several research projects. Without the grant, I would have laid off my lab manager, leading to an interruption in my research program.*

Another faculty member was able to hire a number of undergraduate student “hourlies” to continue and help to complete the research that had been interrupted due to an illness. Six of the other faculty members were able to hire graduate students as Research/Project Assistants. These students were invaluable to the faculty members—helping to collect and analyze data, and write grants and publications, as noted by two of the recipients:

*Results from my graduate students’ work formed the basis for five new proposals during 2009-2010.*

*[This grant] allowed me to train two research assistants who are now using that training, as well as the data they helped gather, to write their own projects.*

Ultimately, the grants’ effects go far beyond an individual faculty member. The funding also provided in-depth and ongoing learning opportunities for the students who work directly with him/her, and the potential to establish their own research agenda.

Four of the faculty members used the funds to **travel and collect data**. These visits enabled them to enhance and deepen their research. Examples of this are provided by the recipients:

*The research trip proved invaluable as the archival material changed my chapter...Because I was able to get into the archives so soon after they opened, I will have one of the first books to include consideration of some of that material.*

*The funds allowed me to make significant research progress by visiting several archives necessary for me to begin my new project. This particular project requires significant archival research to be completed before publication and the VLCP has afforded me time to do that work.*

*The project I was working on demanded quite a bit of travel, which I did not have the funds or time to begin. The VLCP funding allowed me to jump-start the travel I needed in order to complete the research.*

*The grant made it possible for me to conduct two research trips, which as absolutely essential in doing my research...It also broadened and deepened my network of academic colleagues who work at different institutions and whose connections are fundamental for my research.*

Similar to previous years, this cohort provided many examples of how useful the funds were, noting that they would have had to “abandon” their research and the people who worked with them if they had not received the grants.

#### View of the University

Even though the recipients recognize the grant funders as the Vilas Trust, their gratitude is often directed at “the University.” When asked about other outcomes, many of the recipients

identified feeling **supported by the institution** during their extreme crises. One of the recipients explained that he felt,

*An enormously beneficial personal sense that I have the backing and support of this university during an ongoing period of crisis, rather than being a faculty member who has been written off as an unproductive loser.*

Another noted:

*I actually felt very supported by the University during my mother's illness and subsequent death.*

Another found it encouraging that the university was interested in her productivity:

*This funding not only gave me the financial backing to start my new project at a time when I certainly did not have the energy to apply for external grants, but also encouraged me that the university was interested in my progress at UW-Madison.*

When asked what the University could do to support individuals, another scholar noted:

*It should accommodate them—as UW-Madison does quite well—with a combination of tenure pause and extra support. As someone who has had more than her fair share of “life” and wants to continue as a productive scholar, these accommodations have proved life-altering.*

Finally, a different faculty member explained:

*I believe it all comes down to the sensitivity of individuals. We can have all the money and rules in the world, but understanding and collegiality of individuals are the most helpful.*

In her view, this grant was a reflection of “understanding and collegiality” by the University and her peers.

### Importance and Value of VLCP

Evaluation results from the 2009-10 cohort are very consistent with findings from previous years—that is, the VLCP program is **very highly valued**. When asked the question, “Relative to other programs for faculty on campus, where do you think this program falls in terms of value?” the recipients responded with the following:

*Highest value in terms of retention and support for vulnerable faculty members.*

*It absolutely tops everything I have ever heard of.*

*I am not sure I am aware of a lot of other programs that are similar to the Vilas program and so I have to say that Vilas is very valued.*

*I think this is the most valuable of the faculty programs. Naturally most programs are competitive (such as the Faculty Development Grant program) and reward excellence, but for faculty who are not doing well enough to be recognized, there are a few ways to get back on track.*

Finally, the value is seen in terms of the investment in the faculty member:

*Investment in their/our careers at or after a point of crisis is both humane and efficient in terms of generating research progress and publications, attracting outside funds, and stabilizing and accelerating professional development. It is more efficient than losing faculty members who leave, or who become non-productive in research terms, then trying to refill tenure lines.*

### Professional Outcomes

Each of the recipients attributed many **significant professional outcomes** to receiving the grant. For many, the amount was just enough to “bridge” the gap in funding and time needed to apply for and secure additional funds, and to disseminate their scholarship and publish their research for promotion. (Details of the grants, manuscripts, art exhibits, and other types of scholarship are detailed in Section III.) Their stories and experiences however, are better understood in context of their situation and field of inquiry. One scholar used the time to delve deeply into her research and to complete the data collection phase:

*The Vilas grant, which allowed me to finish research for my major project, enabled me to state in subsequent grant applications that the research phase of my project was completed. I was then successful in writing two one-semester writing fellowships, which I have held in 2010-2011. I am confident that this funding success was due to the boost in my research program from the Vilas award. I had previously applied for each of these fellowships and was turned down before the Vilas award.*

Others used the time to write manuscripts or conduct the scholarship relevant to their field:

*I used the research accomplished thanks for this grant, to develop several papers which I have since presented at national and international conferences, and which will form the foundation for my new book.*

*Due to the research trips covered, I was able to be productive over the spring, summer and fall of 2010... Without it, my painting research would have slowed down considerably and I would say I would be nine months behind in the work I have completed.*

Finally, two of the scholars directly attribute the funds to being promoted from Assistant to Associate Professor and from Associate to Full Professor, respectively:

*I did not apply for additional funds after receiving the Vilas award because my tenure case mentors recommended that I simply focus on publishing, which I was able to do because I did have the Vilas funds....If I has not received the Vilas funds, I would not*

*have been able to publish as many articles and my tenure case would have been significantly weaker.*

*I was not at risk for leaving UW-Madison, although I might not have been promoted to full professor had I not completed the research during this time.*

### Summary and Recommendations

The faculty members who received the VLCP for 2009-2010 were very much in need of the funds and used them to progress professionally during a time in which their life was in crisis personally. Over half of the recipients indicated they were at risk of leaving the University altogether or taking leaves of absence, which may have turned into a permanent exodus. Regardless, all have remained at the UW and continue to be productive—publishing journal articles and books, writing and receiving other grants, creating and exhibiting artistic works, and teaching and mentoring undergraduate and graduate students. To that end, the VLCP program continues to be extremely successful in meeting its goals.

A few of the recipients offered suggestions for the program. One faculty member would like to have used the funds to support a semester leave with pay:

*The Vilas program urgently needs to fund the option of at least a semester off with pay, as well as the existing research funding, in order to be more fully effective.*

Another noted that he had not shared the news about receiving it with his colleagues, due to his embarrassment:

*I haven't told others about the grant. I'm still embarrassed that I needed to apply for it, but I am very grateful to have received it.*

It is clear that more work needs to be done to create a culture within UW-Madison academic departments where it is understood and accepted that sometimes personal factors can impact research productivity. WISELI needs to work to change the culture so that receipt of an award like this is not seen as a stigma, but as a positive signal that the faculty member is ready to be productive again.

### **Section III: Research Progress and Scholarship Highlights**

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