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*Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute
University of Wisconsin-Madison*



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WISELI's Life Cycle Research Grant Program

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Life Cycle Research Grant Program

From the original grant proposal:

Research grants will be available to women faculty at critical junctures in their professional careers (e.g., between grants, a new baby, parent care responsibilities). These grants are meant to be flexible and women may apply for varying amounts and academic purposes.



LCRG Goals

- Recognize that life events outside of one's control happen
 - Both men and women experience such events, but women are more likely to experience them early in the career, when they are more vulnerable
- Reduce turnover by providing research support for faculty in crisis
- Understand what events are problematic and which career junctures are most critical
- Understand what faculty need when they are in crisis



LCRG Awards

- Pilot program ran Fall 2002 through Spring 2004
- Four rounds of applications, 14 applicants
- Seven awards
- Funding from both WISELI and the Graduate School



Summative Evaluation Design

- Purpose: *provide information about the impact of the program on the recipients of the grants.*
- Focused on years 1-2
 - In-depth interviews with 4 recipients
 - Follow-up emails and calls
- Five main themes emerged



The Only Grant Based on Personal Need, Not Professional Merit

- Only grant for people who are “suffering”
- Grantees were at a detriment due to our culture (in USA, at UW), because “we don’t talk about these things,” and therefore, are not equipped to address them
- Struggled to write the grant proposal—knew how to highlight their research, but not their personal issues



“We need to change the culture”

“In American culture, people don't talk about their illnesses... You have to project yourself in America as a strong, healthy woman or man.”

“I felt that there was a stigma. So I was a little concerned that there would be the impression that because I had these things going on in my personal life to deal with, and because I'd already been criticized for not working on Saturday and my grants hadn't been funded yet, that there would be this impression that I was not going to be able to cut it. I had the sense that I needed to present a strong front to certain, critical members in my department and to have a sense that they have confidence in my ability to succeed.”



Came at a Critical Juncture in Their Personal and Professional Lives

- At risk of leaving the University, academia, or this world, altogether
- Recently arrived at the UW, was in the tenure process, promotion process, or other critical stage in their careers
- Personal situations were significantly impacting their professional lives



“It helped me realign”

“The life event certainly affected my productivity in publishing papers and that was coming back and affecting my ability to get grants. And so I think it did delay me getting my lab established and recognized in the field nationally, which has really happened with this last paper that we got published... But now in the last meeting I went to, I noticed that people in my field are now recognizing that my lab's up and running, and I'm publishing, and all of a sudden there was a difference of, okay, she's making it... I really think it was because of the life event and the things I was doing with my partner that delayed that. I think the grant helped me realign by being able to get the paper out, showing that yes, I'm publishing, we're going to be successful, I'm going to do fine now. I'd say the grant came at a time when I was rearranging my whole life, and so, everything contributed to getting things back on track.”



Provided Psychological Support

- Provided the needed psychological “boost” to stave off depression, health deterioration
- Made them feel as if they could get over the “hump”
- Grantees used words such as “desperation,” “depression,” “fear,” and “downhill spiral”
- Described grant as “motivating,” “life raft,” and “reversing the momentum”



“I’m out of the downhill spiral”

“You kept my hope up... I was desperate. I was desperate because I knew I was lacking hands to work in the lab, not lacking ideas. But the situation with my family just totally put everything on hold, I wasn't able to concentrate enough to do everything. [My daughter] was hospitalized so much and she needed so much, and we didn't have immediate family around us... So, the grant actually gave me a little bit of hope that I would keep my momentum. Otherwise, I think it would be a downhill spiral. At that moment, the grant pull me up, so that prevented me from sliding further down in my career path. I was really afraid I wouldn't be able to make it to tenure, or even to extend my contract.”



Had Impact on Others' Lives, as Well

- Would have had to dismiss key people in their labs
- Was able to hire lab managers, graduate students, post docs
- All but one (hired as an LTE to provide a specific service) remain in the labs and have co-authored/published with grantee



“I wanted to hire, but I would have had to fire”

“Without these funds, I would have had to let the key person in my lab go. Her salary was covered in full, I believe, by WISELI. She's the key to the lab, because she was essentially managing the lab when I was recovering... It's very hard to exaggerate how much this support meant to me. What it still means to me.”



Is an Investment in the Grantees' Futures and the University's

- Grantees recognized the pay-offs, both short- and long-term
- The grant has supported research, personnel, or technical support that will continue beyond the grant funding year
- Investment can be described both qualitatively and quantitatively



“It was an investment in me”

“[With other grants] you're competing on a national level on everything, and I think that's fair, but you are at a disadvantage because you just don't have the time and energy at the same level as perhaps other people and so it just gives you that little bit of, little extra money to get things pulled together– have another person, have more reagents, have more whatever you need to have your grant be competitive. I also think it's a good idea because of the investment value. If I get my grant, it's going to pay off for the university several fold over.”



Evaluation Conclusions

- Small investment led to significant outcomes, both qualitative and quantitative
- The interviewees identified NO negative impacts from receiving the grant
- All are completely supportive of the program
- Significantly impacted their professional progress, ability to function personally, and decision to stay at the University



Institutionalization

- Funding
 - Short term: Provost Office & Graduate School funding a round in Fall 2004 (5 applications and 3 awards)
 - Long term: Find private resources to fund for all faculty/permanent PIs in perpetuity
 - Women in Philanthropy
 - UW Foundation
 - WARF funding (Graduate School)
 - Vilas Estate



Institutionalization: Success!!

- Vilas Estate funded the awards for all faculty and permanent PIs in the amount of \$310,000 per year
 - Renewable annually contingent upon continued positive evaluation results
 - WISELI retains control of grant administration as long as we exist, otherwise reverts to the Provost's Office
 - Grants renamed: ***Vilas Life Cycle Professorships***



Institutionalization: Success!!

Dear Provost Spear,

The announcement of this Vilas Life Cycle Professorship is one of the most important accomplishments of the University of Wisconsin in my twenty years at this institution. The positive impact that the dedicated leaders and staff of WISELI have had and will continue to have on the workplace climate in various colleges of this campus is essential for the future of the University of Wisconsin. Thank you for supporting them in their efforts.

Lynn Allen-Hoffmann, Ph.D. Professor, Department of Pathology



Institutionalization: Success!!

This is not an application or inquiry, but simply applause. I have often thought this university to be highly unusual, remarkable in many ways. This new venture is heartstopping in its sense of human possibility and its support for that.

Theresa M. Kelley
Professor
English



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