

The Vidda Foundation
Final Report of
The School of General Studies, Columbia University
on grant period 2024-25

NARRATIVE

1. Major Objectives

List the major objectives of the grant as specified in your original grant proposal. Describe the progress toward accomplishing your objectives and note the number of persons affected by your activities (when appropriate).

The major objective of the grant was to help academically talented but under-resourced nontraditional undergraduates with financial support as they continued working towards their bachelor's degrees at Columbia University School of General Studies. In the 2024-25 year, we used the Foundation's grant to name 5 such students as Vidda Foundation Scholars. The Vidda Foundation Scholarship that each of them received consisted of an average of \$13,000 from the Foundation plus an additional amount, up to \$23,200, which we derived from institutional funds.

2. Outcomes

What outcomes have been achieved over the grant term? Was it necessary to make any modifications to the program? Are you on schedule? If the grant did not achieve some of the objectives above, please explain.

Of the 2024-25 Vidda Scholars, four were seniors and one was a junior. All of them made use of their financial awards to stay focused on their studies. All of them maintained (or improved upon) their stellar records of academic achievement. They did so in a range of fields, from Film & Media Studies to Psychology to Computer Science.

3. Evaluation & Learning

Briefly summarize the evaluation process for the effectiveness of the grant. What have you learned from your own evaluation? Describe any lessons you learned in carrying out the objectives (improved processes, new strategies, unexpected obstacles or results, etc.)

The entire support team at GS – including academic deans, financial education experts, and graduate school and fellowship advisers – remained in contact with the Vidda Foundation Scholars throughout the period of the grant. They made sure that the Scholars were meeting all distribution requirements, sustaining a high level of academic performance, and availing themselves of the myriad educational and social opportunities at the University. We learned directly from the Scholars that the Foundation's support motivates them to excel in the present and to give back to society in the future.

4. Notable Accomplishments

What do you consider your most notable accomplishments during the past year?

The 2024-25 academic year witnessed several important new developments at GS:

Major Investment from Columbia University: The University had pledged \$30 million to our financial aid program, and we received the first \$10 million installment just as the academic year was about to get underway. We used the grant immediately to help our neediest students and to give momentum to our public-facing fundraising efforts. It also allowed us to break ground on a new GS-only residence hall, the first one on campus designed specifically for our nontraditional students. It will be open to GS students in Fall 2026.

New York City Scholars: We launched the NYC Scholars Program with a cohort of students from Borough of Manhattan Community College. The program creates a pipeline for students from that institution — and, ultimately, from the other community colleges in the City University of New York system — to become matriculated Columbia students while they are still pursuing their associate's degrees. In this way, the Scholars benefit from access to Columbia's libraries and laboratories, from advising that takes account of the demands of both campuses, and from a deepened identification with Columbia's mission.

Toolkit for Success: Our Academic Resource Center further refined the second edition of its new [Toolkit for Success](#), which lays out the unspoken rules for thriving in the University setting. It shows how to establish relationships with professors; participate in seminar discussions; study for exams in the humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences; and structure academic papers. The guide is one of many resources to prepare GS students, who often arrive from community colleges or other backgrounds with high motivation but scant exposure to the culture of learning at major universities.

Student Fellowships: In the 2024-25 academic year, GS students received many prizes in intramural, national, and international fellowship competitions. One of our students was honored with the Clarendon Scholarship, Oxford University's top scholarship for entering students; 5 won the Fulbright; 4 earned the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship; 4 were Columbia Global Thought Scholars; and 6 were Social Impact Fellows in the Columbia World Projects program.

5. Challenges & Obstacles

What were the greatest challenges/obstacles you faced while developing and implementing the program(s)?

In the 2024-25 academic year, the University's senior administrators negotiated with the federal government to resolve investigations of alleged violations of anti-discrimination laws. The agreements they reached restored funding while protecting Columbia's autonomy over hiring, admissions, and academic procedures. The University renewed its long-standing commitment to provide a safe learning environment for all members of its community.

Amidst these challenges, we at GS were fortunate in 2024-25 to be able to provide financial assistance to another outstanding cohort of Vidda Scholars. Their focus, as usual, remained entirely on their academic pursuits. It was a privilege for us to be able to support their commitment by maintaining this important scholarship program.

6. Partnerships

What other organizations/coalitions have you worked with to achieve these goals?

N/A

7. Looking Ahead

What opportunities and challenges do you foresee for the near future?

GS is the one Ivy League college with an age-blind admissions policy, which means that the vast majority of our students fall outside the traditional 18-22 age bracket. We are a natural destination for working people, community-college graduates, and others who spent the years after high school supporting themselves, providing for families, and/or serving in the military.

We know the importance of opening the doors of Columbia to this constituency. More than a source of opportunity for ambitious individuals, university access is a matter of importance for the nation as a whole. We believe all people in our society should have the chance to learn at the highest level of which they are capable. That means, in practice, expanding access to places like Columbia.

Our biggest impediment to sustaining this vision is the cost of an undergraduate education. Tuition (which is set by the University's central administration) invariably rises each year. Our constant challenge is to strengthen our fundraising so that our resources can keep pace with our mission.

By funding the Vidda Scholarship at GS, the Vidda Foundation is helping us to become the college that we strive to be: a model of inclusivity in American higher education. We aim to inspire other colleges and universities to welcome and support the full range of people, of every age and social background, who want to learn at the highest levels.

8. Financial

Please provide income and expense information to date for the program(s) funded by the grant. Describe any budget changes or financial adaptations.

Please see the accompanying document Columbia School of General Studies "Vidda Scholars 2024-25" and "Vidda Scholars 2025-26" for a breakdown of the Vidda Foundation grant by scholarship per student.

9. Suggestions

Do you have suggestions for ways to improve the Vidda Foundation's grant, proposal, and evaluation processes? Feel free to answer in the space provided below. Alternatively, these may be submitted anonymously by mail to:

***The Vidda Foundation
c/o TCC Group
333 Seventh Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001***

OPTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

If you wish to attach relevant materials, newsletters, articles, etc. that you feel would provide Trustees with a better understanding of your activities and accomplishments, please include here. If materials are attached in a separate document, please include a list of attachments.

Please see the articles appended in response to Question 5 of our Proposal to the Vidda Foundation.