

ODYSSEY ORACLE

CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY

“You are prepared. Go out and transform your world. Welcome to your graduation. Congratulations!” —Maya Angelou, “Commencement Address”



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TO CLASSMATES WITH LOVE

Dear Odyssey 2015 Classmates:

I write this letter to my classmates, thanking you for your honesty, love, laughs, tears, and friendship. I will never forget any of you. I love you all. Friends for life. **(Derek Dodd)**

It's been such a wonderful class. It's been an honor to be in the Odyssey Class of 2015. **(Kelly Hayes)**

Odyssey family, thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I want to thank each and every one of you for joining me in my Odyssey and letting me be part of yours. Each and every one of you touched my heart and will forever be with me. Through the encouragement, laughs, and tears, I was able to grow my confidence and voice. I can't believe it's almost done and that I won't see you every week. However, we will always be family. Love always. **(Nissa Uriostegui)**

I want my classmates to understand that this is a personal letter to you all. I remember when I first applied to the Odyssey Project, and some of the thoughts I was having were about the people I would be going to school with. I wondered whether they would think negatively of me because of my age, my criminal background, and my decision to continue on with my education despite the fact I went to prison.

Since I've been attending the Odyssey classes, I have felt an acceptance that I hadn't felt in years. I've been afraid to go back to the street life. I've had huge health issues with my legs and have had to face the fact that I cannot do things I want to do. Going to school was pretty much my only option. You all have made me feel as though I made a good, sound choice. Not one time have I ever felt different or less than you. You all have shared with me your diversity and achievements for continuing on in your

education. Very many of your lives have been much like mine. And we all have a story to tell.

Thank you for your encouragement and for your sharing. Thank you for your compliments as well as constructive (and sometimes not so constructive) criticism. Thank you for embarking with me on the beginning of our Odyssey journey. **(Patricia McKnight)**

Thank you! I could never express enough gratitude to the staff or my classmates. Your eagerness to learn and your patience for others has helped me regain faith in good people. I have learned just as much from each of you as I have from our textbooks. You each are forever a piece of me. Good luck. Let's do Emily and Odyssey justice and go get them degrees! **(Jessi Hodges)**

The first day that I walked into class, I was a little nervous but excited. I met a lot of cool people and made new friends from all different walks of life. We bonded over laughs and food and good talks. I wish everybody the best and good luck in life. I hope we remain friends. **(Brandi Whitlock)**

It's been real. I'm going to miss each of you guys. Wish you guys the best luck. Peace, love, happiness **(Mikiea Price)**



Hey guys! When we first started this journey together, we were strangers to one another. I didn't know what to expect because I wasn't sure that I would even like the class. Quickly I discovered that we all had something in common. We were all looking and yearning for something better. I am a little saddened because I actually look forward to coming to class. Now that we are almost reaching the end, we won't be seeing each other as much. I hope that after we graduate we can all stay in contact in one way or another. I love how we've blended together in some way, shape, or form to help one another reach our goals.

I hope that my new family stays strong, and I hope that you succeed in whatever you put your mind to do. Take care, everyone! **(Melissa Dominguez)**

You all just don't know how lost and alone I felt before I met you all. Each and every one of you played a major part in the young man that I've become now. You've all annoyed me but at the same time made me laugh, from loud, outspoken Lenora to quiet and shy Heydy. We all embarked on the quest of knowledge together and at the same time played a role in changing each other's lives. I am truly grateful for each and every one of you and plan on continuing a relationship with you. Love you all. **(DeAngelo Hood)**

Dear Class, I want you guys to know that I am so glad to have had you as classmates and friends. I enjoyed everything we did, and I had lots of fun. I hope that all of you continue with your studies and complete your goals. I wish you all the best of luck. God bless you all. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

Thank you very much for this amazing year. It was incredible to get to know each of you. I've learned a lot from you all. Thank you for sharing your lives and experiences with me. I do admire you all



because of your big commitment to continue with your education. I wish you the best, and I hope all of your future plans are realized. **(Natalia Rodríguez)**

Dear Friends, I'm so lucky to call you all friends. This year has been amazing. Every Wednesday is different, not knowing what we are going to talk about. I learned so many things with you and about you. Thank you for sharing such personal things. This is not a goodbye but only a see you later. I'm hoping to see most of you around. **(Margarita Cid Luna)**

To My Classmates: I love how we all had fun and connected. I wish all of you the best of luck, even though we don't need luck because we are Odyssey. Through the months I've seen so much potential and great knowledge, even speeches. I can't wait to see all of you in the next step towards our goals and accomplishments. You all are the heart and soul of knowledge and understanding, coming from confusion to goal achievement. We are no longer Odyssey but alumni Odyssey. Now we still receive knowledge, but we also can give. Being here with all of y'all made me realize that life is good and the people better. I wish y'all well. Don't be scared to call me for anything: [REDACTED] - [REDACTED] - [REDACTED]@gmail.com. **(Joseph Lentz)**



I had an amazing, challenging, and unexpected school year with you. There were moments of random unnecessary drama, and at times this made me less open with work and less engaged in class. Luckily a lot of you were very supportive and pushed any negative thoughts to the side. . . . I love you guys and hope to keep in touch after class. **(Nitia Johnson)**

Dear Classmates, it has been an exciting journey. Now it is time to say goodbye to all my family. M-I-C See you real soon. K-E-Y Why? Because I love you. M-O-U-S-E. Goodbye, toodle-oo, adios, ciao. See you at graduation. **(Lenora Rodin)**

When I first came to this class, I was afraid that I wouldn't get along with anyone or that things wouldn't work out how I planned. After getting to know each other and reading the articles about some of the experiences and struggles everyone has been through, I was more opened up about my struggles. This class helped me believe more in me. I am grateful to have all of you as my classmates. You guys gave me hope and strength to keep going and not give up. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**

I love the GOD in all of you. This class was funny, smart, and full of talent, and I feel blessed to have spent this time with all of you. I came here insecure, with no direction for my life, and being around you guys I was able to be comfortably insecure until I grew confident. I enjoy listening to everyone's voice because it shows character. I'm grateful for all the positive energy we shared amongst each other, and

I wish everyone in here the best—even Lenora J. As we go to the next level in our lives, I pray you all look back and remember the joys we shared, and me. I genuinely love you all differently but equally. . . Love always. **(Shaneika Sanders)**

I think more than others this would be the best time to show my gratitude towards each and every one of you. I want to thank you for your most honest and open opinions. I want to thank you for your concern and your open-mindedness that allowed me to learn from each and every one of you. I want to thank you for even your beliefs and showing me more. Thank you for every minute of every Wednesday that we spent together. Your presence was always warm and inviting, challenging and competitive all at the same time.

Moreover, I want to thank Emily, for she doesn't know how much I appreciate her, her hard work, her dedication, and her love. You are truly an angel from above. Kevin, just as much—you two make such a team. Kevin, thank you for all your hard work and help. It will never be forgotten. And thanks to Coach, a true gentleman and a scholar. You don't know how much you're appreciated. **(Christopher Villalpando)**

I cannot begin to express the love, gratitude, and holiness that each and every one of you gave me. I want to thank Emily for her endless fight and effort to make the world believe in us. Not only does she believe in us (many times before we ourselves believe in us), but she makes all of those who are a part of the Odyssey Project—UW, people and organizations that donate food and funds, and the rest of the staff and teachers—believe in us. The Odyssey Project gave me a hope that was long lost within me. It gave me light to illuminate my path through life, and it expanded my mind. My thirst for knowledge grew and can no longer be dissipated, nor can it ever be quenched. My mind is sharper, my arguments have foundation, and my purpose has been re-established. That, I dare to say, is what Odyssey did to you, dear classmates, not only to me. I want you to know that I walk out of this class

a part of something bigger; a part of a family, a part of a living, soaring heart. For all the things you all taught me, I can only say thank you because I no longer feel like I walk alone on this earth. Please take away from me the gift of love. I love you, classmates, and I am going to miss you infinitely. I admire and believe in you, as I know you love and will remember me. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**

This has been a journey that we've all endured. . . . We've had a lot of laughs, cries, and great debates. I've enjoyed the life lessons that we never expected. When we all collaborated and interacted with each other, I always took those lessons home, and I'm grateful for them. My heart goes out to all of you, and I thank you for the support that you gave me throughout the year. **(Dorothy Katana)**

I'm glad that I got the opportunity to know you all. I'm also glad I now can call some of you friends. I am proud of you all that made it and even the ones that tried. I can't wait to see you all at graduation. J **(Janina White)**

Where do I begin? So much has happened to challenge our well-being, our goals, and ourselves. We have all been tested through trials and tribulations, and look how far we have come! I will not say this is the end, and I sure hope you won't, 'cause there is more to be done from us. I felt so loved knowing you all thought about me and took the time to put a couple of words on a paper to pick me up when I was down. I bet you all didn't think I

would keep that paper and not put it in the garbage. We need to share this love and support with other Odyssey students to give them that security we all gave ourselves and each other. I love how all of us came out of our shells and challenged things that we were for and against, to give us a bigger outlook on life as a whole. We've shared great laughs, smiles, and, most importantly, great conversations. Again, there is more to do beyond May 6. I hope to see you all again! **(Prodajaé Huntley)**

I know that we are all going to go on to continue our schooling, becoming what we want to become. I am glad I got to know each one of you, your stories, and your ups and downs. Each of you is amazing, and the strength you have shown still inspires me. I saw each one of you go through difficult times, and chances are that you will go through them after we graduate too. Please do not give up because all of you have the potential to make it so far. I hope each of us lives our dreams and gets to help others. . . **(Heydy Pichardo)**

First I would like to apologize for not being able to get to know you all better. I enjoyed every moment in the classroom with you all. I enjoyed listening to your ideas and stories. We all shared very personal things from our lives, and the support we gave and received from one another was a beautiful and heartwarming thing. I don't think you all know how inspiring you are to me in different ways. Thank you for making this experience memorable and

enjoyable. I hope you all move forward with your education and accomplish all your goals. I hope to see nothing but growth and happiness in all of our futures. After being a part of Odyssey, I'm sure we all know ANYTHING is possible. **(Latesha Jackson)**



BRANCHING OUT AND BLOSSOMING: QUOTES TO REMEMBER

Tenishia Bland: I have to make sure I soak up enough water during each storm to keep my tree thriving. . . . I want my leaves to stay bright green and healthy, never turning brown from the negative energy of the world.

Michelle Conley: From sun up to sun down I must be all that I can be . . . The Seed that is growing is growing into a Beautiful Tree!

Lenora Rodin: I, like the lotus plant, will remain forever beautiful with a dark past just below the surface.

Shaneika Sanders: I've fallen in love with myself and I enjoy watching myself grow. Who would've known from the cracks in the concrete would rise this beautiful rose?

Melissa Dominguez: My seed needs water and sun, but wait, it has just begun. . . It takes a lot of work to tend to my Garden.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.

William Shakespeare: And this, our life, . . . finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.

Abraham Lincoln: Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.

Kahlil Gibran: Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky.

Walt Whitman: I troop forth replenished with supreme power. . . . The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years.

My Life in Tree Rings by Lenora Rodin

Every year the tree grows, it develops a ring in its trunk. That ring represents the tree's age, and it also tells the story of what that tree has endured. I can identify with its rings because they develop on the inside; I myself have many rings that have grown within me from many seasons of rain and drought. Some of the rings were inflicted upon me by myself, and I will call those rings the rainy and dry seasons, while the rest of the rings were obtained by others, and I will call them the first year growth and the scars from the fire. There were many fires in my life still raging within me wanting to be extinguished, and by God's grace, mercy, and kindness, I found Odyssey.

Odyssey was the fire hose that I needed to help me build more confidence in myself and others. When I first applied for Odyssey, I remember Emily asking me about my tolerance and

if I had any. Of course I said yes, and to an extent I believed this to be true. After all, I was in a bi-racial marriage and I had grown up in a bi-racial culture all of my life so, yes, I was tolerant. But boy oh boy I understand now why Emily asked me that question (she is a wise owl), so thank you, Emily, for your wisdom.

The Odyssey Project has helped me to explore skills that I did not know I possessed. The ones I was keenly aware of, Odyssey helped me develop even more.

So no matter what season you find yourself in, whether it is the rainy season or the drought season, never give up. In Odyssey I experienced all four of the seasons in just two semesters.

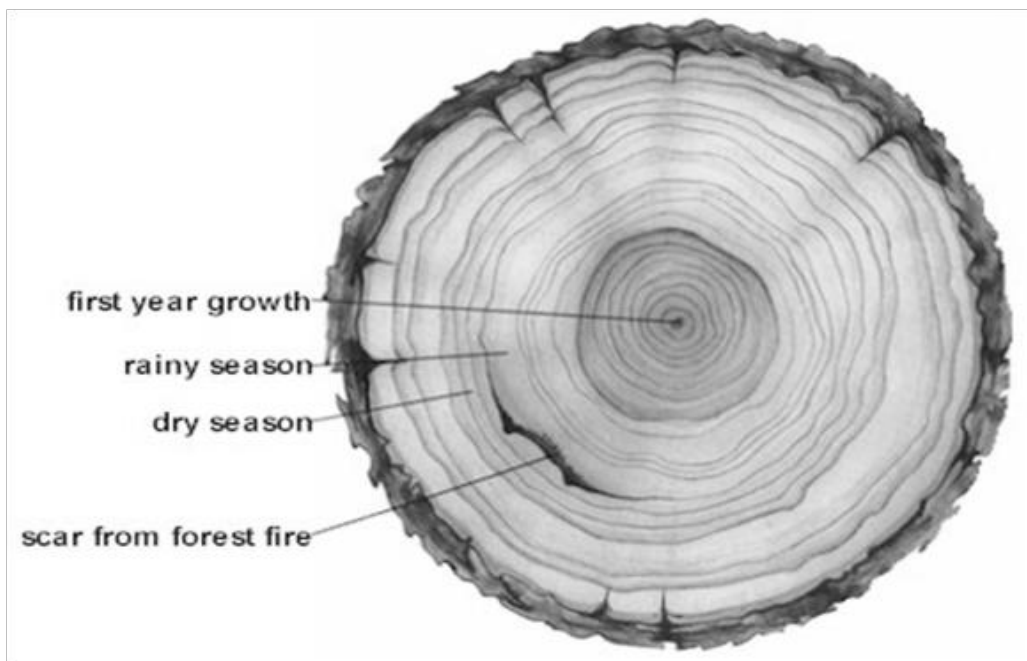
1. First Year Growth = my getting into Odyssey and learning how to deal with the different age groups and cultural backgrounds and differences.

2. Rainy Season= dreary and dark and trying to move on no matter what, such as working, illness, winter coldness, and lots of homework.

3. Dry Season= depression and wanting to give up because I had stopped believing in myself.

4. Scars from the fire= by being with others that had been scarred and sharing with them the different effects that the scars have had on our development, my scars seemed to heal a little bit more.

So in conclusion I would like to say thank you, Odyssey, for taking my battered life and helping me to rebuild myself from the inside out. Thank you for helping me to put some closure on the rings in my life.



PONDERING THE PREFACE:

WALT WHITMAN'S PREFACE TO *LEAVES OF GRASS*

"Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience toward the people . . . go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families . . . reexamine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss what insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem."

"Love the earth and sun and the animals": I agree with this Whitman quote. We are all created from the same materials, we are all created equal, and we are all connected to earth. We should be proud and respectful to every single living soul on the planet. We have damaged Nature so badly, and nobody seems to be worried about what the future consequences could be. Also the food industry has no respect for animals; all they care about is profits. Animals are part of the earth and are living souls with feelings. (**Natalia Rodríguez**)

I agree with Whitman that we should love the earth because without earth we would have no home. Without the sun, we would have no light, and without light and the warmth of the sun we would have no life. Love the animals. Just like us, they have a purpose on this earth. Love them and take care of them. No, I don't think we love the earth today. We pollute it every day throwing garbage. (**Margarita Cid Luna**)

"despise riches": This brings me back to Socrates when he stated "the unexamined life is not worth living." To me, it's like Whitman is saying that no man can legitimately be rich. . . If we gave more, there would be fewer poor

people. Everyone can't be rich unless others are poor, and men have never become rich by being fair; riches belong to the laborers. I agree with Whitman, and his command is not being lived up to today. (**Michelle Conley**)

"give alms to everyone that asks": I grew up in the church; my belief in God makes me agree with Whitman on this phrase. My first few experiences in Wisconsin were not good, landing me and my newborn homeless, but thank the Lord there were people in the community to point me in the direction to get on my feet. Therefore, when I am at a point in my life where I'm stable and able to give back, that's exactly what I'm going to do. I have gotten to experience the fact that a lot of kind, caring, and generous people are located right here in Madison; so I say yes, I do think that Walt Whitman's command is being lived up to today. If you'd asked me a year and a half ago, I would've said no. (**Nitia Johnson**)

I agree with the phrase "give alms to everyone that asks." We should help one another when we can and even go out of our way to help and care for others. Yes, I do think this command is being lived up to today. Just look at Emily and the Odyssey Project. (**Derek Dodd**)

“stand up for the stupid and crazy”: I agree because what might not make sense to you doesn’t mean that it’s not right. Everybody has different opinions and perspectives. All my life I thought that I was stupid, but I’m not. I’m just unique. Some of the world’s smartest, brightest people were called crazy, like Albert Einstein, Socrates, and Vincent van Gogh. **(Kelly Hayes)**

I love this quote. Although stupid and crazy people are irritating, I recognize that we all are who we are for a reason. We are made differently. No matter what life has done to us, no one should be left behind. I believe the real blessings don’t come from loving the lovable but from loving the “unlovable”--the stupid, crazy, poor, lost, forgotten, unworthy, helpless, damaged, sinners, drunks, and junkies. In my experience, the crazy and stupid are some of the most loyal people you will meet. It’s like Odyssey. We (students) are the people the world throws away. We are the stupid and crazy, according to the world, but we are also the most beautiful people with nothing to lose and everything good to gain. Emily not giving up on us shows how standing up for the stupid and crazy can have a positive outcome **(Shaneika Sanders)**

“devote your income and labor to others”: To me this means to do for others more because good will come back to you. I agree with this statement. We should practice this with others. **(Christopher Villalpando)**

“hate tyrants”: I agree with Whitman that this is something we should do. I think we live up to this command today. For example, in schools, staff are educating kids not to bully and how to stand up to bullies. **(Veronica Tinajero)**

“reexamine all you have been told at school or church or in any book”: Since I was pretty young,

I started questioning many of these things; especially anything and anyone related to church. Now that I’m a lot older, and thanks to Odyssey, I do believe in Whitman’s words. I have learned that not all the story has been told in books. My eyes and brain and ears have been exposed to new writings that dismantle the reputation of many textbooks that have been used to teach me. I’ve been witness to why many stereotypes exist. If you are willing to dig deeper, your senses are exposed. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**

“dismiss what insults your own soul”: True words of wisdom are right there. Too many of us hold on to pain far too long, and it starts to affect other aspects of our life. Hurt and pain are feelings, and feelings are meant to change. So the moment that we let pain overcome us, we lose ourselves to it. If we learn to dismiss or let go of the things that hurt us, we can go on and find joy in other things. Not enough of us do this, but everyone should. **(DeAngelo Hood)**



CREATIVE CORNER



The Woman that Hides Inside

She's watching you
She sees all that comes her way
But she doesn't know what to do
But she says she'll be okay

In her eyes you can see her pain
The frustrating feeling that covers her face
That unsure smile that forms on her lips
Can't be disturbed by the most pleasant kiss

Feeling her pain through her skin
You only wonder what's within
She walks and talks like there was never a crime
But she cries inside
She waits patiently for time to shine
From the deep paths within her mind . . .

She paints her words in a letter
Hoping she doesn't get a return to sender
But her chances are slender
She breathes in deep as if to inhale the world
And swallow every branch of every tree and every curve

She lets out a scream
Like finding a body at the scene
Then she retreats
And all bad feelings are released
(Myisha Black)

Because of You

Because of you
My dreams came true
Because of you
My heart was no longer blue
Because of you
The joy inside me came from within
Because of you
My life once again began.

Because of you
My heart was broken
Because of you
I took that token
Because of you
I cried all night
Because of you
I woke up with fright
Because of you
I couldn't move forward
Because of you
I lost focus.

Because of you
I found my purpose
Because of you
My mind's no longer a circus
Because of you
I picked myself up and dusted myself off
Because of you
I know the cost
Because of you
I hit me like a gong
Because of you
My experience has made me strong.
(Myisha Black)

If

If I were gone today, would you think of me tomorrow?
 Would you see the world the same as yesterday
 Or would your pain block the path for your future?

If I were to tell you I loved you
 Would you run and turn the other way
 Or could you accept it and never change?

If I were to run away
 Would you wonder if I were okay
 Why did I move away
 Or what would become if we could fly away?

If I were to find the words to say
 To give my heart a way
 Of expressing what my soul yearns to share
 More than I can comprehend

If I were an anybody,
 If you were a somebody
 Would we be nobody together? (**Nissa Uriostegui**)

I Am

I am a mother
 An aunt
 A daughter
 A niece

I am a creator
 A believer
 A follower
 A beloved child

I am a writer
 A student
 An artist
 A philosopher

I am the past
 The future
 I am Nissa Marie
 I am Odyssey (**Nissa Uriostegui**)



Tired of Being Sick and Tired

When your Blues aren't Blue enough and your Highs aren't High enough,
that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired.

When you go to the liquor store without planning to go to the liquor store,
when you get drunk without planning to get drunk,
that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired.

When you are on a chase to capture that last feeling of euphoria
from that last drug, only to end up alone and depressed,
that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired.

When all else has failed and you can barely look at yourself
in the mirror without disgust and disappointment,
that is when you know that you are Tired of being Sick and Tired.

Are you Tired of being Sick and Tired? (**Lenora Rodin**)



Bars behind a Mind

Alone, my mind and I, gadflies that don't fly
but why are they in the sky when there is no sky,
just bars, exercise, body and mind couple sets at a time
a book here, some food there, in no time dark mind
can't sleep, sounds of crank and clink, sunrise
I go for a second time, gotta find a way out but how
when there's bars behind a mind? (**Joseph Lentz**)



Song of Tenishia

I was born February 16th,
a light-skinned baby with silky hair.
My father said I was too light to be his baby.
Years later, my true milk chocolate color
came through, and here I am.
I always asked myself even as a child,
why did God add me to his angels on earth?
As I got older, I realized that God
put each and every one of us
here for a reason.
(**Tenishia Bland**)



Song of Janina

Janina . . .
I am a nurse
I am a housekeeper
I am a teacher
I am a role model
I am Santa, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy
I am a referee . . .
I am a mother
(**Janina White**)

THE POWER OF DRAMA

Working with Baron Kelly helped me a lot to be more open when it comes to drama, and not to be afraid whether you say it right or wrong. What matters is that you try. Also, by acting, I could imagine the scene back in those years. It was a great help for my performance skills. (**Brenda Juarez**)

The two weeks of drama workshops were really an eye opener for me. During class and the video session, I received so many compliments on my skills, which gave me some much needed encouragement. My most memorable moment was at the coaching session where we shared lunch and got to unwind before working; I will never forget my daughter mimicking me reciting Shakespeare's sonnet in an Oprah tone. (**Nitia Johnson**)



The improv games were very fun. I had never laughed so hard in my life! I hope that I can use those techniques in the future. Growing up I was very shy and soft-spoken, but now I like to scream to the Heavens, "I Have Arrived!" (**Melissa Dominguez**)

The vocal exercises were so funny that I couldn't do them. Now I regret laughing, but the show goes on. (**Myisha Black**)

All of the vocal exercises really helped me a lot. I am usually very shy and reserved, but [Baron] really brought something out of me. I actually took some of those techniques and used them in an interview and landed the job, which was so amazing. I was very assertive, I spoke very clearly, and I maintained eye contact without losing my confidence. (**DeAngelo Hood**)

I don't like to talk in front of people because I stumble over my words. I just felt like I was in a different place, and I did not pay attention to who was in the crowd. I loved the improv games because it made me think on my feet and it was fun. Now I don't mind reading in class! (**Brandi Whitlock**)

My whole life I have wanted to pursue acting—my family says I have a lot of potential and I am like the family clown, in a good way. The exercises we did really brought more to my knowledge of acting. **(Joseph Lentz)**

At first I thought that it would be a regular class, but as the time went on and I participated more, it became really fun. I learned that acting is a feeling. It didn't matter whether or not I knew the material already or that I am dyslexic. **(Kelly Hayes)**

I was the one person that pretty much thought that acting was not her thing. I was not as vocal as my classmates, but I enjoyed every single class. Seeing people act a scene or people portraying a character was amazing. It was so much fun, and an experience I will never forget. **(Heydy Pichardo)**



I was freaking out. There was this tall man, his voice was high and clear, and he had an impressive presence. He was tossing a ball at Dorothy, and he sounded intimidating. I was glad I wasn't having a ball tossed at me and being asked to throw my energy out as I said my name. Then he started to toss the ball around. I was kind of hiding behind and trying not to be spotted, but he saw me. After I said my name and the activity was over, Baron came up to me, looked me in the eye, and said, "Don't be scared, it's okay." He carried us through during coaching sessions, and I can attest to the blossoming of my classmates through his guidance. **(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)**



It made me understand how important it is to express my feelings and not to care about others' reactions. Also, I learned how important it is to take risks to improve. No matter if I fail, I will keep trying. **(Natalia Rodriguez)**

Through the vocal exercises I learned how to speak loudly and clearly, instead of sounding like a mouse. From the scenes from *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Macbeth*, I learned that I can find myself within the character. **(Nissa Uriostegui)**

I was blessed by the exercises to let go, have no fear, take a chance, take a leap of faith, and challenge myself. I liked the warming up of the vocals. I liked when we performed scenes from *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Macbeth*. I feel I can perform on stage and not feel so nervous and out of place. I will take from the experience to change and step out on faith. **(Derek Dodd)**



was something about [Baron], the same way I feel about Emily, just the energy and the drive and motivation to show people things that really do matter in life, and give people the chance to grow through education. I most of all enjoyed the practices we did with the sounds and the role playing . . . like when we were pushing against one another or

Because we practiced saying a few words and learning where to put emphasis, I now can speak like a butterfly and put bass in my voice to sting like a bee. My voice will now be heard in a room of a thousand people, especially ones in the waaaaay back! After acting out *Macbeth*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and doing improv, I no longer mind speaking to a group of people! **(Michelle Conley)**

rehearsing some of the quotes from Shakespeare. **(Christopher Villalpando)**

I once took a class like this in prison, and I still reap the benefits of it—going into an interview with my head high, confident and, most of all, outspoken. It shows employers the real you. When others go in, they get this 10% of a person because they are shy or nervous. I really hope that the ones in our class who were shy take away a lot from this and apply it to their everyday life. Funny thing is that I even told my sister that there



TO THE CLASS OF 2016



First of all I would like to congratulate those of you who made it. You don't know it yet, but you're a part of a big legacy. I know when I first began this class I was nervous and I was scared, but just **trust** and believe that Mrs.

Emily and her whole team want nothing but the best and have nothing but great things in store for you. Come in with an open heart and mind, and get ready to be changed.

(Kelly Hayes)



Before Odyssey I wanted to enroll in someone's college so bad it didn't matter whose. But something always interfered. I applied for Odyssey and received not an acceptance letter, but a letter stating I would be first on the wait list. Well, as you all could

imagine, I was a bit disappointed, and after that I was done reaching for a higher education. I had a newborn baby and enough other things on my plate. Two weeks before first semester began I received a phone call from Emily saying that she had room for me in the class of 2015. Of course I accepted it with great honor. I promised her I would try my hardest and not let my daughter be a distraction or excuse. I was a UW Odyssey student!

The first semester started off all right for me. I came to class and did my work. But I went back to work soon after the semester started and the pressure was on. It became hard to keep up. Between work, my daughter, school, and finding housing, I wasn't able to do it all. At least I thought I couldn't. I got behind on homework, but I still did not miss a class. After a while it became overwhelming and my personal life was going downhill. I gave up. But Emily did not. She continued to call me until I responded. She helped

me get back on my feet and focused. I've realized how lucky I am to be a part of this program. Second semester I missed quite a bit of class. I made the mistake of not reaching out for help in the beginning. If I could do my Odyssey experience over again, I would go about it in a completely different manner. But the message I am trying to get across is to be grateful and appreciative. This is an amazing program full of people who really care and want to help you. Use it to your advantage and enjoy this experience.

(Latesha Jackson)



Welcome to the Odyssey Journey. I must say this was a Journey! This Journey taught me so many things: One, never give up; two, everything that seems to be challenging is not meant to give up. There were times when I thought about giving up because I was working two jobs and raising

three kids. It seemed like everything was crashing down on me at once, not to mention I was pregnant with my fourth child. But when I came to class on Wednesday, my favorite mentor (Carol) was always there to encourage me, and my classmates' smiles and jokes kept me going. Whatever life Journey you face, stick with it. It wouldn't be a Journey if everything went great.

(Mikiea Price)





Welcome to the Class of 2016! Even though you don't know me, at the end of your journey in the Odyssey project we will be family—an Odyssey family! Don't be intimidated by the class because these wonderful

people are here to help you. At first, when I started, I did not know what to expect, and I wasn't sure if this was for me. The more I came to class I realized that I had been missing out on so much. Don't be afraid to open up and enjoy your time here. You will go places that you would have never imagined you can go. Expand your mind and absorb all the knowledge that you can, and don't let anything or anyone tell you or keep you from doing your best. Believe me, it can be hard; I know firsthand. From September to May, I was on crutches two separate times and it was really hard for me to get around, but I stuck it out and finally made it through the obstacles that were standing in my way. So take this experience and welcome it because it can help take you very far. All you have to do is "Believe in Yourself!"

(Melissa Dominguez)



You are getting ready to embark on a remarkable journey. I was in your shoes just last year. Walking into that room of 29 strangers was a bit intimidating for me that first day, but I stuck it out because I knew that this was something I needed to do for myself.

It took me a couple months to really open up to the other classmates, but after reading some of their articles in the Oracle I felt like I had known them forever. Honestly it was my fellow classmates that helped keep me going. Life is never perfect or easy. Sometimes you want to give up and go back to your normal life that you had before. Don't!!!! If life was meant to be



easy, it probably wouldn't be called life. In Odyssey we are a family, so get to know your classmates and even some of the alumni. We are here to support you to get you across that stage in May. Also, don't be afraid to open up to Emily. Having this woman in your corner is like having a championship winning coach on your side, and she will help you as much as she can.

Odyssey is not like your typical classroom. We are allowed to voice our opinions at all times but in a respectful manner. We are adults that come from different backgrounds. So welcome to this wonderful family where your thirst for knowledge will be filled. It's a lot of reading and writing, but I promise you it's worth it. The staff is amazing and everyone here wants to see you succeed. No risk, no reward, right? **(DeAngelo Hood)**



Welcome to the Odyssey Project. It may not feel like it now, but in a few short classes, being here will feel like home. I came in reserved, unsure if this class was for me, and left confident it was the door of opportunity I've waited my whole life for. Your odyssey won't always

be easy, but I promise that if you are committed it will be worth it. If you are struggling, utilize the support system designed for your success. Good luck and God bless!

(Jessi Hodges)



and you might gain a couple of best friends. I'm not going to lie to you: it's hard working full time, coming home, making dinner, and then trying to make it to class every

Wednesday on the cold winter days, but trust me it's all worth it. I wanted to quit so many times. Losing my mom in the first semester was the hardest of them all. I wanted to stay home and cry my soul out, but knowing that my

mom would have wanted me to finish what I started gave me the strength to keep going, knowing that she would be looking down on me. So please don't give up. You are going to have many reasons to quit but don't—keep pushing.

(Margarita Cid Luna)



Welcome to the Odyssey Class of 2016. I graduated with the Class of 2015. I hope you are ready to learn and get introduced to new things. You will be doing a lot of reading, writing, and group discussion. I enjoyed coming to class every Wednesday night. I

met new friends, we got new books, we ate like a family, and we cried, talked and laughed. For me I didn't face a lot of obstacles during this time. I had a good support system. But if anybody needed help or just a few encouraging words, I was right there to help. Odyssey is like your second family. We all go through problems and have the same issues, but we can help each other out. Emily, Kevin, and the other teachers will do anything to help you out and make sure you can get to class or finish your homework. They will work with you! You get to see art works you may not have seen before, read a poem that fits you like a glove, or go to a concert that you couldn't afford to go to before. The best time I had is when Baron Kelly, the acting coach, came to teach us a few things about acting. He really got me out of my shell. Enjoy!
(Brandi Whitlock)

I know it's scary, it's your first day, and you might not know anybody in the classroom. But trust me, by the end you are going to know everyone,



Congratulations to you all, embarking on this odyssey. I'm a 2015 graduate. This will be one of the most important times of your lives. I ask that you take total advantage of this wonderful opportunity. Allow yourself to be open-minded and

vulnerable at times. Take this class seriously and focus on the teachings. Don't wait until the last minute to do your homework; give yourself proper time to finish all your classwork. There were times when class got difficult, but that's only because of poor preparation on my part. Students of Odyssey 2016, I plead—proper preparation and ample study time will be a key component of your Odyssey journey. Don't allow any negative student or comments to hinder you. Take advantage of the Odyssey staff and participate in class always. And ask questions if needed—don't feel ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help. Odyssey students, sit back and enjoy this Odyssey journey because it will last a lifetime. **(Derek Dodd)**



Hi Class of 2016, I'm from the class of 2015. First and foremost, congratulations on being accepted into the Odyssey program. I can only hope that you take this opportunity to put forth 110% of you—because with putting forth effort into bettering yourself, then

you are actually doing the same for the program because it's made for you! Understand that you couldn't be in a better place for starting, continuing, or coming back to your education, no matter your age or educational background. Ask yourself what your why is, and your why should wake you up every day. Your why should make you put that much more time into doing your assignments and listening in class. This staff that is standing in front of you right now is more than amazing—they are here for you and they want to see more out of you. They do see more in you than you ever thought you saw in yourself. Words cannot begin to express the way I feel about Emily, Kevin, Coach, and the rest of the staff that work with this program. Whenever you say someone is heaven sent then to me that person is truly amazing, and Emily and the rest of the team are just that.

Take that next step and leap off into an education that will actually break down everything to the point where you will understand why



Shakespeare is still being taught to our students to this day, after hundreds of years. Come in and be open minded and objective about what you hear and learn, and understand that what you put in is what you get out of this program. It sometimes takes my breath away to see what lengths Emily and Kevin go through to help the students here in Odyssey. Once in your third or fourth week, sit back and look at all that is put in to make this program what it is.

Even the volunteers who come in to share, educate, and help out get you and every one of us to the next level. It's a wonderful feeling to have someone you barely know want to help you succeed, and, moreover, to push you to succeed like these new faces do. Funny thing is, more than friends, they will go above and beyond to see you do better, to see you have better, and to see you achieve greater things in your life. I know that being accepted in this program is the beginning of something great. Even though I myself was in college before but didn't graduate, I know that this is just a stepping stone to my higher education. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world to start back my education and move forward to greater things. I wouldn't change being in the presence of Emily or Kevin for anything in the world. Everything about this program is positive—the camaraderie, the friendships, and the teamwork that gets everyone involved with learning. So help out and be that year that lets go, lets loose, sheds their shyness, and dives right in. Come out of your comfort zone and be that year that amazes and stands out more than the rest. Be ready to learn and speak your opinion, and don't shy away from what others might think because here in the odyssey your voice matters.

Oh, and please turn your phones on silent, or better yet keep them in the car . . . Don't be that person where Emily is in the middle of a discussion and your phone goes off. She wouldn't do that to you! **(Christopher Villalpando)**



My name is Sahira Rocillo. I want to tell you a bit about me. I was born in Mexico and moved to Madison when I was 18 years old. I did not speak any English and it took a little while before I did. I was able to graduate from high school and go to MATC for a little while, until I could no longer

pay for my classes. Then in 2013 I became a mom to my little boy, Dorian. I love him with every cell in my body. Those of you who are parents know the feeling. After becoming a mom I began to feel really alone and I felt a big lack of support. Despite the bumps on the road, I am here to tell you that things do get better. Look at me: I am an Odyssey Project graduate, which makes me part of the Alumni, which makes me part of an elite group, but most importantly it makes me part of a wonderful family.

I was blown out of my mind when I received Emily's call telling me that I had been accepted to Odyssey. I am sure many of you will agree with me, being accepted into Odyssey was the best thing that happened in a long time. This is a journey. Just know that your teachers and staff are there for you, and you can rely on them. They will do anything in their power to provide you with the tools and flexibility to be on top of your academics. Obstacles, time, family emergencies, physical and mental health, stress and life, will try to block your way to success, but if you maintain an open communication with Emily, you can be sure that you will have all her support and help.

I was diagnosed with SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder, a couple of years ago. SAD is a disorder that affects your mood and energy during a certain season, especially winter. Let's just say that I had to wrestle with myself every day. I decided to talk to Odyssey's Resource

Coordinator, Susan, and through Emily and the program I was able to get help, and I even experienced the benefits of LED light therapy. Apart from my beloved classmates (yeah, this is the first class of your life where you will LOVE every single one of your classmates), Emily and Kevin were the very ground where I could feel my feet planted solidly, and I was no longer hanging from a thread.

I want you to take a minute and applaud yourself, and acknowledge your brave and courageous decision to apply to the Odyssey Project. I would also like to congratulate you because today you are sitting on a precious spot among 29 other special classmates that will grow into you sooner than you think. Here you are, sitting in a room, a real college class is about to begin, and this is your first day as a member of the Odyssey Project. I bet that even now, as you begin to get aware of your surroundings and fix your eyes on your new books and materials, it might still feel surreal. Well, I want to let you in on a new realization, so take a breath and let it sink in . . . ready? **YOU ARE NOW A COLLEGE STUDENT!**

When it was me sitting there on the first day, I remember reading the letters that the previous class had written for us. The one that stuck with me was: "Fasten Your Seatbelts." Let me tell you, that little phrase encases all those things that might be running through your head, and yes, it is a threat, and you are not to take it lightly; but in a really good way. This class will change your life. If you are

coming with a positive attitude, if you let yourself go and render your soul and energy to this project, I assure you, it will be one of the best experiences in your life. So good luck, Odysseys! Have fun, buckle up, and squeeze every single drop of awesomeness and success from this class. Congratulations, Class of 2016! **YOU CAN DO IT! YOU ARE NOT ALONE ANYMORE!** All the success and love to you.

(Sahira Rocillo Ramírez)





I was in the Odyssey Class of 2015. When they told me I was accepted, my life and hopes got higher and brighter. I'm not going to tell you that it's an easy journey or that there will not be challenges because there will be, and also there will be struggles or

obstacles that make it harder to get to class. But if you're really involved and want to succeed, Emily and Kevin will not let you give up. See the class as a big family that's trying to make a change for the better. Don't feel alone because every one of your classmates has struggles, too. Odyssey is a big opportunity for a big and great change in your life. Use it and take advantage of every single opportunity you have, as it's always positive. Hope you have a great year. **(Brenda Juarez Cruz)**



Are you ready to rumble?!?! I'm here to tell you that no matter how quiet you may be, the literature you're going to read will help you conquer many of your fears. William Blake will make your head spin until you see that he is not crazy, and that we are all

just ordinary people! In this class no longer will

you need to be judgmental, but you will embrace being different because that is what makes us all unique. Odyssey will redefine the way you eat, sleep, and think because no longer will you take time for granted—you will cherish every hour, every minute, and every second you have been given. Look at the 30 men and women around you because this group of people is now travelling on a journey with you. This new family is amazing, and you're all ingredients of a magnificent recipe. Listen and learn because literature is your new best friend. Just ask my man Socrates: this journey will lead you to enlightenment all because you took advantage of a great opportunity!! Now float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. Writing now helps my consciousness be free! **(Michelle Conley)**



Today you are embarking on a journey with 29 other students and an amazing team of teachers. You are probably looking around at the other students and wondering what could we possibly have in common? However, by the end of this course you will become

a family, a very unique one at that. You will also create some unforgettable friendships with Emily, Kevin, Coach, Craig, Gene, and Jean. Each one of



them is there to see that you succeed. Never take advantage of these amazing people for they will believe in you when you can't believe in yourself, and they will love you when you can't love yourself. If you are so lucky to love them back, you will truly understand how special they are and how blessed you have been to know them. So if there is a doubt in your mind whether this is your thing or not, trust me, don't give up and stay awhile. Believe me when I say by the end, you won't want to leave.

Hi, my name is Nissa Marie Uriostegui (don't worry you won't be quizzed on my last name) and I am proud to say that I am a graduate of the UW Odyssey Project. When I first walked into that classroom I was a scared single mother to four children who was very skeptical and had a double shield around her due to her past. Besides my family and my close friends I didn't let many people in; however, with the push of Emily and Kevin and the support of my classmates, I am now a strong, confident, and independent woman. Always remember that you will never be judged and you will never have to worry about where you come from or who you are. All you have to be is true to yourself.

I'm not going to tell you that this is going to be easy; but it's not impossible either as long as you take advantage of the resources that are available to you. My journey was a challenge, and there were times that I wanted to give up. But all good things usually come with hard work. The one thing that saved me was Kevin and the tutors (If Jarrett is available this year take advantage of him, for he is one of the best). I am a big believer that if you want to succeed and exceed with this program, then you should at least attend tutoring once a



week, even if it's not mandatory. Not only did I see my writing improve over the year, but I also saw my understanding of the readings improve, especially when we were reading Socrates. The best part of it is how accepting the library and Kevin were of bringing your children in while you're at tutoring. I was able to bring my four children in to tutoring with me, which really saved me because there was no way I could have found daycare for them twice a week. My favorite part of it is watching how amazingly Kevin interacts with my kids and the incredible bond he has created with them.

You will be going through a lot of texts over the next year. Some will excite you and some will bore you, but no matter what, never give up on any of them. One of the hardest ones for me was Socrates; however, when you figure it out it will make so much sense. No matter if you love it or hate it, soak it up and make it part of your life for the next year, for it will make the rest of the texts so much easier to understand.

Also, soak in the poetry, for it will change your writing forever, even if you're not a poetry kind of person. Believe me when I say there is a poem for everybody, and somewhere out there, there is a poem or a poet for everybody.

You have a busy year ahead of you. There will be actors, visitors, art, fieldtrips, and self-exploration to look forward to. By the time you're done, you will never be the same. I want to wish the best to all of you. Make sure you enjoy yourselves as you begin to embark on your on Odyssey. I hope that all of you find your path to your Odyssey because this journey will be unforgettable and will forever stay with you.

Best regards! (**Nissa Uriostegui**)



I am an ESL student and a mother of two children. I did not have to worry about daycare since it's offered here at the program, as well as dinner. Odyssey is an excellent opportunity to expand your knowledge. You will learn

History, Literature, English, and Art. I enjoyed reading about Frederic Douglass because I did not know very much regarding slavery. His book gave me a much better picture of it. I have improved my English with the help of tutors and teachers. I remember when we needed to make some Art, which I am not very good at, and I made something that could easily be compared to a kindergarten student, but I had fun doing it.

Being an ESL student made it very difficult for me, but YOU can do it! Balancing school and family is tough; however, being organized allows me to remain organized at school and at home so that I am able to complete all the activities that are needed. An advice I want to give you is to start your assignments on time and to use all the help that the tutors and the teachers can give you.

An unforgettable moment occurred on a Wednesday night, as I recall, when my husband was not in town. I was getting ready to bring my kids to daycare so I could attend class. My daughter was sleeping, and I had to wake her up. I carried her on my back, down the stairs, and we fell; thankfully, nothing happened to her, but I bent and injured my toes. I was limping for two

weeks. I remember going to class with a lot of pain, but I thought there is no chance to skip class because I loved every class.

So as you can see, I love to go to school, especially this fun class which gave me lots of new knowledge as well as good new friends. I hope that you enjoy this experience as much as I did. Best wishes to all of you.

(Veronica Tinajero)



Congratulations on being selected to this amazing project. Welcome to the Odyssey Class of 2016. You might think it's a little scary entering Odyssey class, but it's not. Prepare for one of the best experiences of your life and one of the most

rewarding. You will learn a lot in extraordinary lessons. You will learn how to love reading, lots of history, so get ready to learn. If you don't like to read, that will change. In Odyssey class you can't NOT want to read some of the books Emily talks about. Don't be afraid to ask





around you. Be patient and open with yourself, and tell yourself from the beginning that you will fight through your fears, no matter what. Once a week make a decision to come out of your shell and be free of all chains, even if it's only in your writings. I came in a failure and came out with no need to even compete with anyone. The "me" I found through my Odyssey Journey I found taking the steps I've written above. I became a winner when I decided after every fall I'll always

for suggestions. I can honestly tell you that I have never read so many books in just one school year. All thanks to Emily, you will be doing a lot of reading and writing that will transform your life. You are about to enter the world of studying and will get to know so many great personalities that definitely changed the course of US history.

get back up. I wish you joy. I wish you love. Enjoy the journey . . . (**Shaneika Sanders**)



I am writing this letter to congratulate you for one of the best gifts you'll ever receive. This is the opportunity you all have been waiting for, that one chance that a lot of people have denied you. Your chance is the Odyssey Program. Today

I can tell you, you've made an excellent choice to be part of Odyssey as part of your continuing education. I am sure this will be a very productive and exciting year. My best advice to you all is to work until the end of class and the end of the year. Emily will expect you to be ready from day one. Always remember that you are a big element in this class.

is the start of a hard two semesters, but trust me it is worth it. In this class you will want to give up, but Emily will help you to see it through. You will enjoy every single Wednesday and regret the ones you miss. The reading is hard, but you will learn to love it. It will make you realize how much you have missed by not reading more. If you ever get stuck on your homework, help is only a call away. The instructors want you to succeed and will give you all the help you'll need. The journey is long and full of challenges, but the things you learn and the people you meet will make it worthwhile. Hearing and sharing personal struggles and challenges will help to make you grow as a person. I wish you the best during and after the program.

I wish you good luck on this amazing journey, so keep calm and survive Odyssey 2016.

(**Natalia Rodríguez**)



Welcome! As you travel down the Odyssey Journey to yourself, don't be cautious. Listen to the stories around you to get a better understanding of the world

(**Heydy Pichardo**)

WHO SAID IT?

Find out in the graduation program on May 6!

“The best thing about Odyssey is that it forces us to peel our layers and unwrap those gifts inside of us.”

“I would just like to thank all of my fans. . . . Just kidding.”

“Instead of being a shadow in the background, I am now a bright shining light.”

“Here at Odyssey, I had a chance to rekindle, practice, and motivate myself to go after my dream.”

“I give thanks to my mother because she knew my potential and that I was wasting it all being in the streets every day.”

“Learning Blake in the Odyssey Project gave me a headache.”

“I want to learn more, read more, see more.”

“I, too, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have a dream: that a girl born in the projects . . . would be able to get an education and someday a college degree.”

“Just like Wanda Auerbach, I have the same dream of one day making my daughter as proud as she made Emily.”

“I will never be the same person I was before Odyssey. It has definitely changed my life, the way I see the world, and the way I think.”

“My classmates from Odyssey are some of the coolest people I ever met. I love how the Odyssey Program opens its doors to different races from different places.”



THE ODYSSEY PROJECT

CLASS OF 2014-2015 GRADUATION CEREMONY

Varsity Hall, Union South
1308 W. Dayton St., UW Madison Campus



WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2015, 6:30 - 8 PM
Reception Following

You are cordially invited to attend the graduation ceremony for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project Class of 2014-2015. Project Director Emily Auerbach will present certificates attesting to students' successful completion of introductory UW credits in English. UW Chancellor Rebecca Blank will offer congratulatory remarks.

From September to May, students in this rigorous, six-credit humanities course have discussed great works of literature, American history, philosophy, and art history while developing skills in critical thinking as well as academic, creative, and persuasive writing. The evening will include music and refreshments, brief readings by each graduating student, recognition of the faculty team (Marshall Cook, Jean Feraca, Kevin Mullen, Gene Phillips, and Craig Werner), acknowledgment of our generous donors and support staff, and presentation of the third annual Wanda Auerbach Memorial Scholarships to past and present students facing adversity as they continue their higher education. Please join us for an inspiring evening!

