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ODYSSEY ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2018



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Nuñez



Carla Herrejon



Arioun Jones



Alexis Law



Adrian Molitor



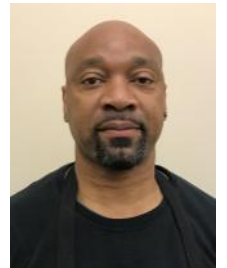
R. Bruce Moore



Selena Muñoz



Sayury Peralta Vivanco



Johnnie Phiffer



Maya Rasheed-Bracey



Reginald Reed III



Nathaniel Robinson



Barbara Rodgers



Victor Rojas



Lisa Simmons



Hayley Sjuggerud



Ladaro Taylor



Bao Thao



Ameshia Turner

FEELINGS ON JOINING ODYSSEY

Students in the new Class of 2018 were asked, "How did you feel when you learned you were accepted into the UW Odyssey Project?"



I remember the feeling like it was yesterday. It was late afternoon and I had thrown another load of laundry into the washer. I saw a random area code number calling and figured it was another telemarketer calling until I heard the voicemail. It was Emily congratulating me on my acceptance into the program and I felt like Superwoman. I felt confident and like I could put my mind into something I really wanted to do. **(Selena Muñoz)**

Grateful, excited, anxious. **(Arioun Jones)**

I was really happy and thrilled. I felt I was stuck for so long in my comfort zone, which really wasn't comfortable. I know this will be the journey to my own success. No more telling myself when and maybe later. It's time I do something for myself while raising a family. **(Bao Thao)**

Very excited!! **(Reggie Reed)**

I was very happy and humble for the opportunity. I don't have words to say how happy I am to be here. Inside of me, I said, "This is a challenge that I need to accomplish." **(Sayury Peralta Vivanco)**

I was excited when I found out, but I was nervous as well. **(Carla Herrejon Tinajero)**



I felt really proud and motivated because just being able to start new gave me a new sense of accomplishment. **(Keziah Bester)**

When I learned I was accepted in this class, I was very excited and very happy. I was ready to come to the class and learn. **(Guadalupe Hernandez Nuñez)**

Elated, thirsty, hungry, determined, motivated, a dream come true, a door was opened. **(Bruce Moore)**

I felt very proud and honored. The closer it got to the first day, I began to get nervous and anxious just because I didn't know what to expect. **(Maya Rasheed-Bracey)**

I felt blessed, as if it was a great chance to face my fears of school and a chance for me to grow within myself. **(Barbara Rodgers)**

I was very excited. **(Derrick Allen)**

I was very excited, and I know this program is going to help me succeed in whatever I put my mind to. **(Alexis Law)**





Excited. It's a new journey in my life for me and my children. It's going to be a great learning experience, a reflection. **(Ameshia Turner)**

I am overly excited and "ready" to paint the world with "pink diamond dust." My mind is so eager to learn. **(Ta'Tiana Clacks)**



I was excited and nervous. I was looking forward to this new journey. **(Charnice Anderson-Morris)**

Excited, happy, but I'm still nervous. I don't know if this is the right class for me. **(Irma Guzman)**



Pretty hopeful, happy. Objective to the future. **(Hailey Sjuggerud)**

Feel good, very excited. **(Victor Rojas)**



I felt relieved. I am nine credits from the UW. I need these resources, friends and context. I am really happy to write. I love language! **(Adrian Molitor)**

I was very excited. I shed a few tears because I applied before and wasn't accepted at that time. This is the perfect time in my life to be involved in this program. **(Tyjeana Galloway)**



Thankful, blessed, scared, excited. **(James Davis)**



Excited. I believe whatever I want will come true, if not now, soon. **(Ladaro Taylor)**

I felt accomplished, proud and like I'd been given a chance to start over. **(Ruthie Allen)**

I was really excited because I knew that I had a second chance at receiving credits to further my education. **(Sch'Royce Brown)**

I feel wonderful, and I am excited for the future. **(Tori Armour)**

I'm shocked that I got in because I felt like I wasn't qualified enough. **(Lisa Simmons)**

I was very grateful to be accepted. I was not sure I was going to meet the requirements. I am really glad that I did. **(Angela Carpino)**

I'm hoping being a part of this class I'll be able to see more clearly, as I truly believe it would give me guidance and possibly create a smoother path for me in where I want to go in life. **(Nathaniel Robinson)**

I was at work (I'm a dishwasher) when I saw I had a call. I listened to my voice mail while putting up dishes. It was Emily saying I was in the Odyssey class. I dropped everything. It was a pan, so luckily it didn't break. I called my wife. I still couldn't believe it. Ever since that message, I've been feeling I'm in a life changing situation. I don't have a lot of book smarts, but I will work hard, and I promise you I won't quit. **(Johnnie Phiffer)**



ARE YOU A WRITER?

I used to love writing. It was an escape for me. I was able to share how I really felt. I lost that feeling and desperately want it back. I am a published poet and have written several papers in high school that people found entertaining. My goal in writing wasn't to entertain, but to be understood. I am most proud of a paper I wrote in high school about race vs. ethnicity. I was able to get people to understand my perspective as a biracial woman. I am hoping the Odyssey Project will help me spread my wings again. **(Tori Armour)**

During high school, I have also gotten positive feedback and a lot of support so I could be successful. Sometimes I used to think my vocabulary and essays weren't as good as the others', but I kept moving through with motivation. **(Alexis Law)**

I do not think of myself as a writer even though I am writing. I tend to think of myself as a thinker who happens to write. The reason why is because I am a failing poet. I lost a competition in high school to Laura, and it killed my drive to write because I HATE losing. Here is the poem I wrote: Darkness...I can't remember that poem. My door is closing. Closed. **(Ladaro Taylor)**



I am a great writer in need of error check. I switch between cursive and regular writing. My mind has no limit, as "pink space" is my limit. **(Ta'Tiana Clacks)**

I consider myself a lazy writer. I would like to see more growth and effort put into my writing. **(Barbara Rodgers)**

I do not have problems with writing except my grammar. **(Victor Rojas)**

I love to read. I have over 200 books now. I would love to put onto paper everything I have learned. I am a writer. I was born to write. No negative, only positive. I write a lot at home, but I am the only one who reads it. One time I wrote was for the Odyssey Project. **(Derrick Allen)**

Well, English is not my primary language, so I am still learning this incredible language. **(Irma Guzman)**

I used to write fictional stories for myself all the time. People would tell me I was a writer, but I never believed them. I just thought everyone could do it if they really wanted to. I did have a few stories published in school, and my mother saved a short story I wrote about her when I was only 12. I read it the other day and I was surprised at myself, having never lived in the era of the 70's, which was when the story was set. I tried using their lingo and giving descriptions of their hair and clothing styles. When I would write, I would always have notes on the different characters on a separate page. The story settings are always places I've never been, only in my imagination. I would love to open that door again and write and be proud to share it with people. Thank you for giving us all this opportunity! **(Tyjeana Galloway)**





I feel like I could be a writer. I have lots of stories to tell. Sometimes I dream of writing a good juicy book. However, I am not confident in my writing skills. Grammar, punctuation, and English in general were not my strong suits in school. Now, since I've gotten older, I worry about using computer programs to format my work. One positive experience I had writing an essay was to get my HSED. I got good marks and felt somewhat proud. **(Hailey Sjuggerud)**

At one point while I was in grade school in Chicago, I had an opportunity provided by the University of Chicago in conjunction with Chicago Public School (CPS) to take part in Young Author Society and had my writing published along with other students. Our work is in the Library of Congress. My story was called "Code Blue." I couldn't believe that a little brainstorming could lead to a story, let alone being published. While in high school I continued to write, but I ran into a teacher who criticized me, along with most of the class, as being a bunch of nobodies that will most likely end up under the "L" on 63rd doing nothing but being losers, all because she didn't and refused to accept that time changes along with dialogue. With her constantly putting us down, more than 85% of her class didn't pass and had to attend summer school. At first, I cursed and hated her for that, but my mom taught me in life to look for a silver lining, which is what I did. I attended summer school. where I met a bunch of great people who encouraged me to write again. It helped so much. I became a counselor by the next summer with the American Legion Premier Boys State and was able to encourage other students not to give up no matter who or what gets in your way. **(James Davis)**

I can be a writer. It's just sometimes when I think I'm writing it out, it comes out not the way I wanted to write it or express it. **(Bao Thao)**

I don't love to write, but I like to write sometimes. I do not consider myself a writer because it's not something I like to do in my free time. A positive experience I had in high school was graduating on time with the rest of my class. A negative experience I had was allowing myself to fall behind and having to get everything done at once. Something I wrote that opened a door for me was getting into the Odyssey Project. **(Arioun Jones)**

I don't consider myself a writer. I'm afraid that I don't have the right words to say or express my thoughts. A negative experience I've had while writing is the grammar. Sometimes I write past tense verbs, etc. I think what I wrote in my application made me get in the program to become a better writer and reader. This class inspires me to accomplish my goal to go back to school. Thank you for the opportunity. **(Sayury Peralta Vivanco)**

I definitely am not a writer, but who knows what can happen? **(Johnnie Phiffer)**



I consider myself a writer by any means. I've always liked to write, whether it's feelings, letters, or just random notes. Something about it is therapeutic. However, I could work on my writing as far as using proper writing styles, words, etc. In school, I didn't do too good at essays because my writing would be all over the place, jumping from topic to topic. Writing the few sentences to get into Odyssey definitely opened a huge door for knowledge and opportunity to learn how to write in the correct way and form. **(Maya Rasheed-Bracey)**

I used to write all the time, but I do not consider myself a "writer." I am very good at expressing my thoughts. Grammar may not be correct, I may use the wrong words, but I enjoy writing. The time I felt most proud of writing was in third grade. A poem I wrote was featured in our school book and placed in the library. My biggest fear of writing is that people may not understand what I am trying to say. They don't know the meaning behind the words, so to them they are just words. **(Charnice Anderson-Morris)**

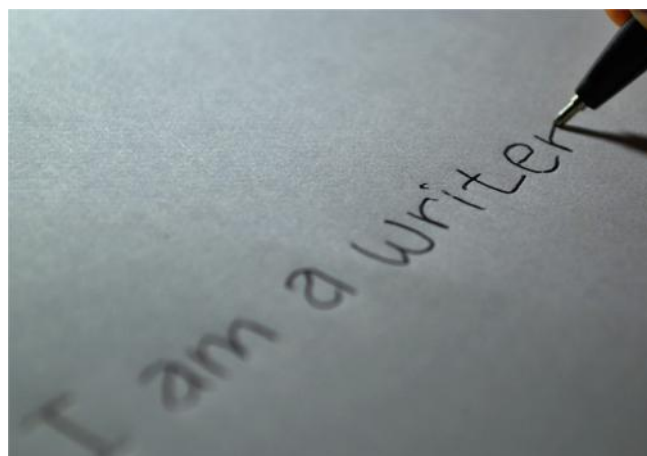
I used to consider myself a writer to the point of wanting to be a journalist. Not sure, but I guess life set in and left my love for writing on the back burner. My negative experience always was getting writer's block. One time I wrote this small but serious note that introduced myself to this gentleman and ended up with, "P.S. I can cook." Those words led to fun times. **(Ruthie Allen)**

I am a writer but was told on many occasions that I cannot. It happened when I was a child, in high school while taking college courses, and at work. In spite of those situations, I still wrote because it did things like inspire me, empower me, it took me places, and enabled me to not just help myself, but also others. The paper I wrote to get into Odyssey opened a door for my future. **(Bruce Moore)**



Right now I do not consider myself a writer, but it would be great if I could start considering myself to be one. Why not? Because I feel that I don't know if what I am writing down makes sense. In school, I feel like I had a negative experience all the time. I always felt shy and scared. I also felt like I wasn't able to learn as fast as other students. I also always had to rewrite or correct a lot of papers or essays that I wasn't able to write correctly in order for the paper to make more sense. Something that I think I felt proud of writing was probably an email to a friend making them feel better about what they were going through. **(Carla Herrejon Tinajero)**

I always wanted to give it a shot. As you can see, I suck at writing with a pen. I want to learn everything that I need to learn for this class. **(Lisa Simmons)**





My feeling towards writing is very simple: I have always loved writing. It's a way to express feelings. However, sometimes it is very difficult to write some words because of my language (Spanish). That could be a negative experience I have always experienced. One good experience I have had with writing in school is discovering new ways to express the emotions and just learning new words. When I was in high school, I wrote a poem about the political situation in Mexico, where students were being oppressed by the government. I did this in Spanish, but I'm open to learning to express myself in both Spanish and English. (**Guadalupe Hernandez Nuñez**)

I feel I could be better at writing because when I try to express myself, I often scribble out words and try to rethink about what I am writing about. I try to make it sound better so the reader actually feels what I am writing. My grammar and punctuation are also not the greatest. Something positive I remember writing was when I took the Compass test for the first time. I remember getting a good score and feeling good about myself while writing the essay because I felt I was really explaining the topic well. I knew I was going to do well on at least that part. (**Angela Carpino**)

Yes, I would consider myself a writer, but in high school I had an issue with run-on sentences because I just wanted to hurry up and get it all out. A time that opened a door for me through my writing was my small business plan when I

attended MATC. I got a grade that I wasn't expecting, and it helped me teach others about the do's and don'ts of business plans. It made me feel good about myself. (**Sch'Royce Brown**)

I consider myself a writer because I love expressing myself through music and poetry; I even journal from time to time. During my senior (or junior) year of high school, my English teacher expressed his idea as writing being a good tool for grief and a process of thought. I've written many pieces since. I have many ideas and stories to write, but I sometimes struggle with translating my words in an academic way. For example, I received a "3" on the essay portion of my ACT, but my love of writing has carried me through. I am always looking for ways to improve my writing and revising skills, and I look forward to becoming a published author someday. (**Reggie Reed**)

I love writing, but I love when I can do it my way: just letting the words flow and not worrying about spelling or punctuation until the end because grammar isn't my best skill. I like to be imaginative, and I like to write poetry and combine deep thoughts. When it comes to writing essays and papers, it is not my favorite thing to do, but I know I can do it as long as I put my mind to it. I come from a long line of writers in my family, so sometimes it feels like it's something that is in my blood and comes naturally. However, sometimes I have to work to get the words from my head to paper. (**Keziah Bester**)





At the moment, I consider myself a potential writer thanks to the Odyssey Program! Writing has always been a weakness for me because of all the concentration I would put into learning English. That being said, vocabulary is what is important in my writing with correct punctuation. Throughout the program, I am hoping to shift my concentration from punctuation to expressing myself on paper. (**Selena Muñoz**)

Yes, none really negative, I just write to myself. Writing music and letting people read it gets me good feedback. I let Emily read a poem I wrote, and she loved it. All the other people I read it to said I should have it posted. (**Ameshia Turner**)

You better write to live
like you have a right to live.
From the blue lines on white paper
we got that light to give
like this narrative was wrapped, papered and
taped December twenty fifth
my father emptied many fifths we
could smell the pine needles on his breath.

Short words blasted through extensive pronunciation
Metrophobia like don't say another...
(**Adrian Molitor**)

Poetry has been the way I can really vent my emotions out positively. Ever since I started writing, it has been my therapeutic medicine for my mental and emotional health. When I put my thoughts and feelings into words it feels as if I'm able to release whatever it is that is on my mind flow out of me in a more creative effective way. Here's a poem I wrote while I was incarcerated:

Bars and Gates

Make for a lonely confusion
that only seclusion can create.
It's hard not to accept fate,
when you're stuck in a place
where love is replaced by hate.
Seems like there is no escape
As our minds get ate by the thought that
we may only relate to this closed confined space.
You should see us in this place.
You can see the stress seep through our face.
People say, 'Hey, are you okay?' as they watch me pace.
I say I get a bad taste when I see my own race
at a world record rate being thrown to waste.
But the ones who can change this stand face to face
Paralyzed by the way time supplies its weight.
Damn, it's so hard to contemplate
That I'm part of a statistic and I got to find
a way out before it's too late.
Bars and Gates.

(**Nathaniel Robinson**)



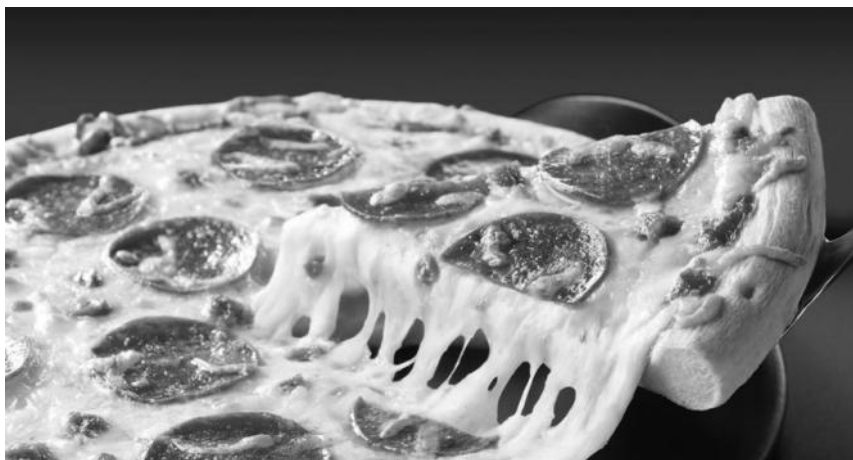
SENTENCES ABOUT US

- I am a single mother of five beautiful children, three girls and two boys, and I love them all the same.
- It has been hard the past five years of my life, but no matter how hard, giving up was never an option.
- If I die tomorrow, my kids will always carry me with them in spirit, mind and soul. I showed them what survival of the fittest means. (**Ameshia Turner**)



- I saved two puppies from two shelters: "Hunter" from cage fighting dogs and "Buck" from shelters.
- I keep the book *The Four Agreements* in my bag at all times (it's like my second Bible).
- I eat pizza three times a week. (**Selena Munoz**)

- I'm Native American, African, and Jamaican.
- I've been playing the piano since I was five years old.
- I didn't speak until I was four years old. (**Reggie Reed**)



- I have two daughters that are two years apart.
- I've lived in Madison all my life.
- My favorite color is coral. (**Angela Carpino**)
- I just turned 20 on September 5th.
- My dad played football for the Badgers.
- I'm eight months pregnant and expecting a baby boy. (**Keziah Bester**)

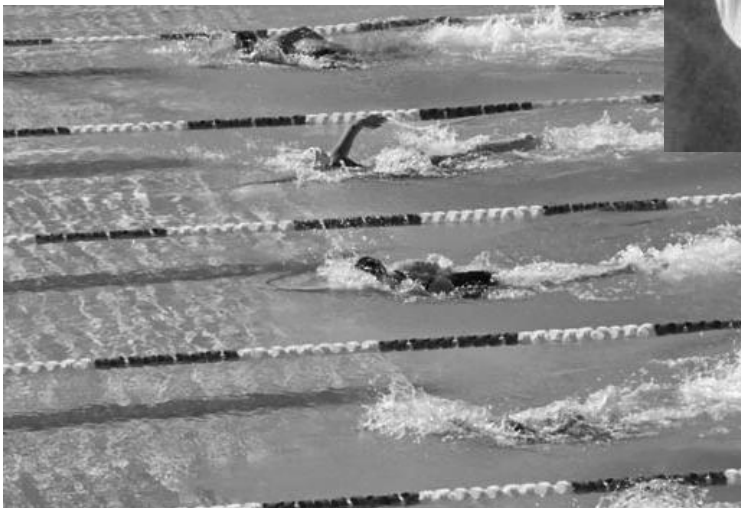
- I'm a mother of a three year old.
- I'm a job hopper; I'm not proud of it, but I just don't see myself working for other people for a long period of time.
- I'm a risk taker. (**Sch'Royce Brown**)
- I have five children, two dogs and two cats.
- I'm my father's only child of color.
- I love to cook. (**Tori Armour**)

- I have two children, a boy who is six and a girl who just turned three. From the moment I became a mother, everything I did/do is for them.
- I would like to become a social worker and help troubled children through their life struggles. (**Charnice Anderson-Morris**)

- I have one daughter that is four years old.
- I am currently working in a restaurant.
- I just love being a parent and having privacy in my home; I love all of my family.

(Guadalupe Hernandez Nuñez)

- I come from a very large family; I am the second oldest out of the eight children that my mom has.
- I have over 100 first cousins.
- I love to color here and there on the side sometimes. **(Bao Thao)**



- I have four brothers and two sisters and am the youngest of them all.

- My brothers Rodney and Jae are my heroes.

- I love kids, to paint, and to help people. **(Lisa Simmons)**

- I work two jobs.

- I find joy in swimming; it also relaxes me.

- I have a nine-year-old daughter, a thirty-five year old, a thirty-seven year old daughter, and a thirty-nine year old son.

- I put almost all of my grandchildren in swim lessons so they can learn how to swim and increase their self-esteem.

- I love working with mental health and dual diagnosis. I see people at their lowest times. With others working as a team, we create and maintain an environment that provides hope, encouragement, resilience, processes, and foundations that empower them to get better and be better, which assists with breaking recidivism and hopelessness. A lot of my patients come back and thank me for what I do and how I do it. **(Bruce Moore)**

- I'm a huge fan of Tom Jones, and my fiancé and I were serenaded at the Patty Labelle concert here in Madison at the Overture Center. **(Ruthie Allen)**

- I love my family, I have three children, and I have been married for 16 years.

- My family (mom, sisters) are in Mexico, but we have really good communication by phone (FaceTime).

- I like scary movies. **(Irma Guzman)**

- I have two sisters and three brothers.

- I come from a big family.

- I would consider myself a middle child. **(Barbara Rodgers)**

- I have four brothers.
- I've worked at a job (in-home care) with a client that spoke no English and I didn't speak the same language as them.
- I've traveled to 13 different states in the past 12 years. (**Maya Rasheed-Bracey**)
- I'm 19 years old and the oldest of five other siblings.
- God opened the door for me to go to college.
- At one point in time, I was homeless and struggling on my own. (**Arioun Jones**)



- I have two beautiful sons named Cole and Isaac.
- My two sons were complete surprises to me when I was age 33 and 38, after not having children for so long.
- I've had many jobs, but for the last decade I have worked as a cook, waitress, and coffee barista. (**Hailey Sjuggerud**)

- I have twin sons who are 16 years old and go to East. They are both taller than me.
- I am 10 credits from starting at the UW.

- I have a beautiful wife and three children, two boys and one girl.
- I like my job because every day there is a different problem to solve.
- I like pottery. (**Victor Rojas**)
- I lived in Tucson, AZ and all over the U.S. for many years. I worked as a tattoo artist for five years but no longer do. (**Adrian Molitor**)

- I am a mother of four children and raised my two older nieces and nephews. I am now also raising another niece that is seven years old. I'm a hard worker, responsible, and like to help anyone that I can.
- I was working as a hostess and did not speak any English. I only knew the basic words: "How many for your party?" and "Smoking or non-smoking?" I was afraid when customers would start conversations with me because of my limited English.
- I love my kids and I want them to be proud of me when I accomplish my goals. (**Sayury Peralta Vivanco**)





- I am the mother of an amazing eight year old with a health condition. He is my motivation, and I am due with twins in March 2018.
- I am obsessed with pink, and I am Beauty Business Entrepreneur.
- I have an amazing man who loves me and my son named Malcom. I love him very much. **(Ta'Tiana Clacks)**
- I have a four month old boy, and he is the best thing that could've happened to me.
- I like caring and taking care of the elderly.
- My mom is my role model. **(Alexis Law)**
- I have jumped out of a helicopter twice and a plane once.
- My worst experience in life was when my son passed away in my arms.
- I'm currently saving to take flying lessons at Dane County Airport. **(James Davis)**
- I enjoy all sorts of art, from music, to drawings and paintings, along with dance.
- I can feel the energy from a picture, a song, or the movement of the body behind the scenery.
- I have always had an interest in philosophy, astronomy, poetry, reading, art, and sports. **(Nathaniel Robinson)**
- I have two biracial daughters, one Hispanic and the other Italian and Polish. I have a Hmong granddaughter also.
- I'm trying to opt out of an abusive relationship that has gone on for about 14 years.
- I'm very sensitive; I listen to opera, rap, and pop, and I love playing the violin and piano. I'd love to get lessons. **(Tyjeana Galloway)**
- I work at Monona Terrace, and I'm married with six children, three girls and three boys.
- My dream is to be a writer. I would like to write a book about my struggles and successes.
- My hobby is collecting large tropical fish. I have four large tanks in my man cave. **(Derrick Allen)**
- My worst fear is success, but not for the reason that most people fear success. I feel success will kill my ambition. To fail or succeed, I don't know what's worse.
- I am a huge comic nerd.
- I am the only one in my family who cannot dance or sing. Maybe I'm adopted. **(Ladaro Taylor)**
- I used to box professionally for a while.
- I do a lot of physical training.
- I love working with people.
- **(Johnnie Phiffer)**



ALUMNI CORNER

Finding Bearden and Homer in Chicago

By Robert James '14

Presented at a symposium on artist Romare Bearden's "Black Odyssey" series



No modern struggle would be as important as our Quest for Self-Definition. To define a race, it becomes necessary to examine the past. By choosing Homer's *Odyssey*, Bearden forces black people to ask, "Where are the black heroes of yore?" The question is the prerequisite for the connection of culture removed by chattel slavery. Bearden understood that art was a highway to cultures. He introduces African, Mexican, Asian, and European influences. In this way, art becomes education!

Odysseus represents stratagem, resistance, and character to overcome sorrow. He was unable to save his crew, a dilemma faced by black men often unable to save their own family and friends. Known as a man of many trials, Odysseus has many traits of poor black males. Odysseus's name means "trouble" in Greek, both giving and receiving trouble. Like Marvin Gaye's "trouble man," this theme resonates with all inner-city and heretofore poor men. Odysseus' heroic trait is cunning intelligence manifested as deceptive speech and use of disguise. Now blacks call this "the gift of gab." It takes "cunning intelligence" to survive urban areas like New York, L.A., and Chicago.

My own *Odyssey* confirms Bearden's art. I've had to understand that I am pieces of my mom, dad, grandmom, godmom, the Chicago housing projects where I grew up, the time I spent behind bars, and even my family's expectations. As my *Odyssey* (life) unfolds, my collage changes. Just like art, when you look deeper you find something new or another way to understand what has already been there.

I see connections between Bearden's representations of the monsters in *the Odyssey* and modern day life. The Cyclops could represent the one-sided view of justice, racial profiling, and the way prison destroys men. Medusa can suggest that poverty immobilizes, just as Medusa petrifies whoever she looks upon. The Sirens are hood women headed by grandmothers who tell ghetto tales and raise their daughters to date hustlers. These women condone and support crime; they are the drug mules and the hideouts. They are the divas and material girls. Circe suggests drug dealing causes one to lose morals, thus turning them into pigs. The Lotus Eaters represent people preferring to use cocaine and heroin. Scylla represents gun violence and the power associated with guns, like Scylla able to take a life in an instant. Scylla had six heads; original handguns were six-shooters. Charybdis represents vice, sucking victims in slowly. Vice can make you totally lose your way. The underworld is prison because sometimes there you find seers like Malcolm X and new ways to get home. Odysseus's adventures happen on oceans, a perfect place to symbolize life's unpredictability in the ghetto.

Just as Bearden was fearless in recreating traditional respected art works, so must I be fearless when facing the stereotypes and societal beliefs of who I am as a black man. Like Odysseus, there can be no doubting, only striving to complete one's evolution. All that matters is reaching HOME, which symbolizes that place of peace within your mind and spirit.

Woman on an Odyssey: Keena Atkinson, Odyssey '10, UW '15

From UW News

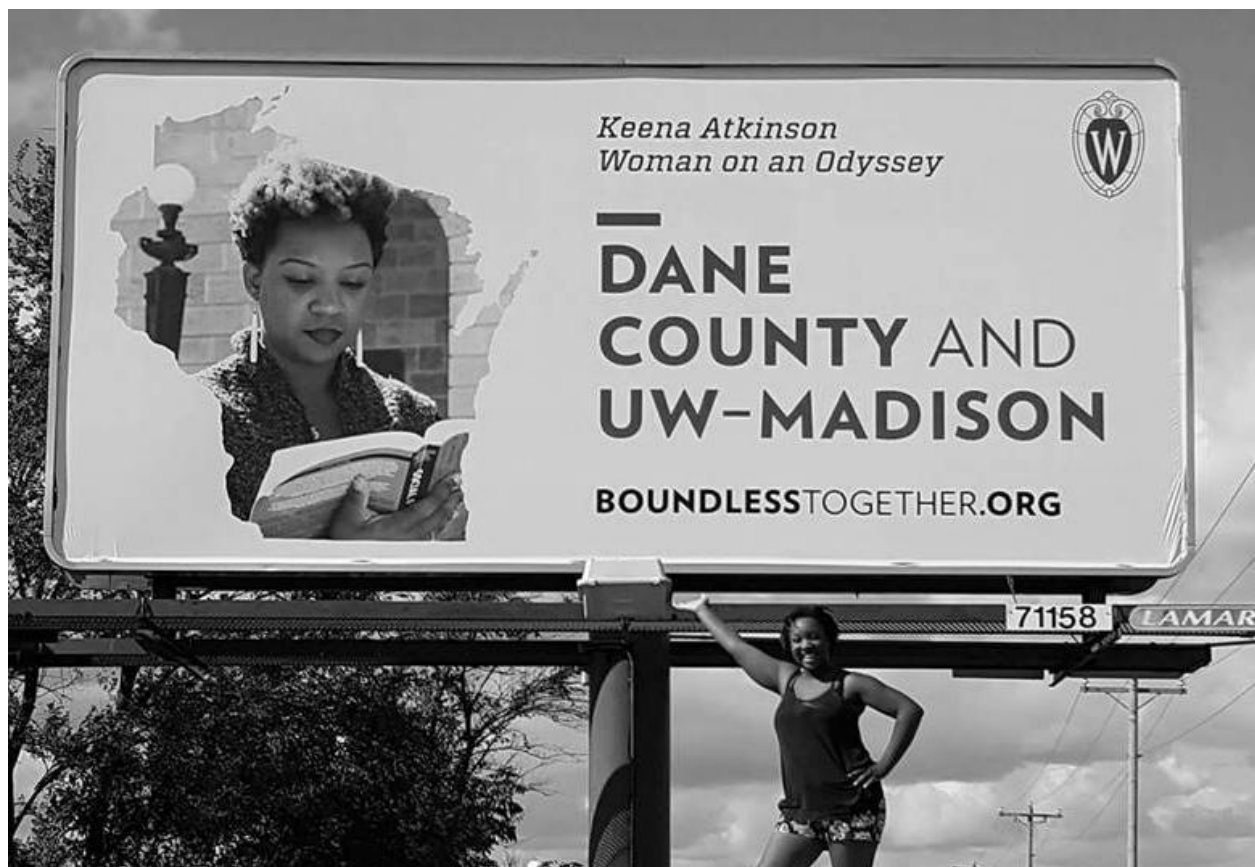
Keena Atkinson knows what it means to persevere. Before she became a UW-Madison graduate and was recruited by a major corporation, she was a homeless, single mother. What changed her life trajectory? Many things, including Atkinson's hard work and inner drive to change her life for the better. Another factor was the UW Odyssey Project.

"The Odyssey Project opened doors for me," says Atkinson. "It helped me to believe in myself."

The Odyssey Project helps men and women living near the poverty level to find their voices and get a jump-start on earning their college degrees and finding meaningful work in their communities. Often, Odyssey Project participants are dealing with addiction, incarceration, depression, or other barriers to education. Participants receive free tuition, textbooks, childcare, and a weekly dinner.

With a child to care for and the child's father serving a 10-year prison term, support from the Odyssey program was essential to giving Atkinson a start. She loved being in a classroom again.

"Toward the end of the Odyssey program, I realized that I didn't want to be done with school," she says. That's when she made a decision to find a way to get a degree at UW-Madison.



Despite her determination to earn her degree, Atkinson knew that her top priority needed to be her son. So, first she went back to school to earn a cosmetology degree to ensure that she would have a job that could support her family while she pursued her college education. Then she began her path toward a bachelor's degree by enrolling at Madison Area Technical College, later transferring to UW-Madison. That is where the real challenge began.



"I didn't really have a social life at the UW," she said. "Everyone's between 18 and 22." But, Atkinson eventually found a community on campus at Wisconsin's Equity & Inclusion Laboratory (Wei LAB).

"That's where I met the people who were interested in the same issues I was interested in," she says. "I could talk about things freely with white people and black people. I never had a chance to have those conversations before."

Through the many hours of work, finding childcare, working, and figuring out ways to finance college, Atkinson kept a profound sense of gratitude for her college experience. "I just appreciate everything I did to earn that degree," she says. "I earned it, and I'm so proud of it."

My Odyssey: A Life-Altering Journey

By Eugene Smalls '12

Read at his Odyssey Project graduation ceremony

I was born in prison: my mom was in prison while she was pregnant with me, and she died during labor as I was born. Because of the lifestyle I chose, I was in and out of prison or jail all my life from the time I was 12 years old.

In 1997 I was born again and began a journey with Jesus. In 2011 I began a different kind of journey called The Odyssey Project, setting me free from a life of ignorance and illiteracy. My journey in and through Odyssey has been breathtaking and life altering, and I am blessed beyond my imagination. I am in Odyssey, and Odyssey is in me. I went from a drug-addicted, alcoholic, drug-dealing, and gangbanging thug to a hardworking man of God who visits and preaches to those who are behind bars. Hallelujah!



ODYSSEY PROJECT PROVIDES HOPE FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

by Dean Robbins for UW News



“If I had not been in the Odyssey Project I would not be where I am today,” says Josephine Lorya-Ozulamoi, a refugee from Sudan. “I would have been in a dark place. But instead the Odyssey Project shed a light into my life, and I am on the road to success.”

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Odyssey Project is a free college humanities class for adults near the poverty level, helping them achieve their dreams of higher education. Over its 14-year history, Odyssey has attracted many immigrants and refugees from all parts of the world. These students enrich the class with their varied perspectives, just as multicultural newcomers have always enriched the United States.

“Immigrants broaden the definition of America,” says Odyssey Project director Emily Auerbach. “They make us look at our own history and values through fresh eyes. When we find common ground in class, such as writing about dreams for our families, it breaks down all kinds of walls.”

The 2016-17 Odyssey class provides a melting-pot vision worthy of Emma Lazarus, whose poem “The New Colossus” graces the Statue of Liberty with its image of “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Indeed, “The New Colossus” is a key part of the Odyssey reading list. The poet’s words have special meaning for Odyssey students who’ve journeyed to America for the promise of liberty and justice for all.



Joy left Trinidad and Tobago in search of tolerance for homosexuality. She arrived in New York City with \$100 in her pocket and Martin Luther King's words ringing in her ears: "Free at last, free at last!"

"It was a dream come true, and I felt like I belonged," she says.

After working for many years as a custodian in Madison, Joy hopes to continue her education and find more fulfilling work. She sees Odyssey as a step in the right direction.

"I will expand my mind and expose myself to many different perspectives on life," she says. "This is a journey that will open up new opportunities for me."

Ahmad planned to study dentistry in his native Syria. But war intervened, and Ahmad received a visa to pursue his education in the United States. After several semesters at Madison College, he applied to the Odyssey Project to improve his writing and find a community.

"Since I am alone in America without my family, I wanted to be around people," says Ahmad, who was recently granted political asylum by the Department of Homeland Security. "Odyssey will keep me going forward to pursue my education."



Grisel emigrated from Mexico at age 15, entering Madison's East High School with no English skills. Since then she has dedicated herself to serving the community and is currently board president of Nuestro Mundo Inc., which promotes cross-cultural education. She was chosen as one of Brava Magazine's "Women to Watch" and received the Centro Hispano Ilda Conteris Thomas leadership award.

Grisel entered the Odyssey Project to improve her reading and writing skills and to find motivation for earning a college degree.

"I know I can do a lot more to serve our community by preparing myself educationally," she says. "The Odyssey Project will help me grow professionally and as a person."

For inspiration, these current Odyssey students can look to Lorya-Ozulamoi, who emigrated to the United States after escaping the war in South Sudan. Lorya-Ozulamoi's experience in the 2008 Odyssey class provided the springboard for an undergraduate degree, and now a graduate degree; in May she will earn her master's in social work from UW-Madison. She plans to embark on a career of helping refugees.



Lorya-Ozulamoi had a rocky road to completing her degrees, marked by financial hardship and bureaucratic obstacles. But she persevered with assistance from the Odyssey Project.