

Year 15, Issue 1

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# ODYSSEY ORACLE

## WELCOME, CLASS OF 2018!



### In this Oracle . . .

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Graduates of the Odyssey Project have gone on to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees from Madison College, UW Madison, Edgewood College, and other institutions, have won scholarships and awards, and have gotten accepted into graduate school. Alumni pictured on page 1 are Josephine Lorya-Ozulamoi '08, Kegan Carter '04, Shirley Johnson '04, Cameron Daniels '07, Yasmin Horton '07 with James Horton '09, Sharisse Hancock '13, Tom Gardner '08, Zeynab Ahmed '13, Keena Atkinson '10, China Moon Crowell '14, and Yolanda Cunningham '13. Alumni on p. 2 are Sherri Bester '08, Mary Wells '07, Molinda Henry '07, Shanita Lawrence '09, Edwina Robinson '12, Milli Lau '14, Tineisha Scott '04, Michelle Brown '05, Lorena Lovejoy and Katy Farrens '07, Lucia Chikowero '15, Dominique Christian '09 .



# TO THE CLASS OF 2018



Don't panic. You're sitting in this rectangle of tables at a spot of your desire, and you're constantly thinking how this class is going to be. You're watching everyone who comes through the door, becoming more nervous as time goes on.

Trust me, you will be perfectly fine! You will soon consider these people as family, your supportive team, people who do nothing but motivate you more and more. Sometimes, you can become discouraged by others from their knowledge and intelligent words, but you are just as wise. Take pride in yourself and for once shine and throw yourself out there. You are not going to be judged. You are accepted 100%. Your journey has now begun. Good luck and HAVE FUN! **(D'onna Atkinson)**



Welcome to your new adventure. Please enjoy every moment. The first day in my class I was feeling nervous like you because I thought I wasn't ready to take college classes. But let me tell you something: thanks to this class, I improved my

reading and writing skills. I enriched my knowledge by discussing poems, American history, art, and philosophy. Sometimes, you might want to quit. DON'T DO IT because at the end of this course you will feel totally different and very proud of yourself. Odyssey is a wonderful class where you can express your feelings and thoughts. Personally, I can tell you that the Odyssey class is my second home because the students and all the Odyssey Project staff are friendly, and I always feel they are like my family. Again, welcome to Odyssey: attend tutoring to finish your homework, don't miss any classes, and do your best. **(José Mendoza)**



As you are sitting down and reading this, you are probably thinking, "What am I doing here? Did Emily make the right decision in choosing me?" So many questions and doubts come to mind, but just think of it this way. You have been given the golden ticket to a great adventure of a lifetime.

From personal experience during my four years of high school, I felt like I didn't have the same support as I did during my year in Odyssey. Also in Odyssey, you get to learn about many different Black writers during the Civil War and the Civil Rights movements. You learn about other works unknown to many people that were written by Martin Luther King, Jr., stuff that is not taught at high school or anywhere else unless you attend a special class for it, like Odyssey.

I can't tell you how happy I am for you that you got accepted. Believe me, it will be the best decision and opportunity for your life. You will learn many things, you will see things from a different point of view, and you will be a different person by the end of the year. Enjoy every minute of it.

**(Susana Gomez)**







*¡No te rindas y sigue adelante! Keep going and do not give up!*

I had the same feeling like you do right now. It may feel intimidating, but let me tell you that what you are about to experience is a once-in-a-

lifetime opportunity. I know the feeling; it took me two years before applying for the UW Odyssey Program because I was scared and because I thought it might be too difficult for me since English is not my first language. Well, guess what? I can tell you that this class has helped me a lot to improve my reading and writing skills.

I still remember I started my first full-time job at the same time that I started Odyssey; it was hard at first to adjust to going to class, going home, feeding my children, and then doing the homework. Please do not worry because Odyssey staff and volunteers will always be there to help you whenever you feel stuck like I did many, many times. Odyssey for me is like my second home. It feels good to talk to your teachers like Emily and Kevin, who are always there to help you, and going to tutoring at least once a week helped me get homework done.

*¡Bienvenidos y siéntete muy orgulloso por lo que estás por vivir!* Welcome and be proud for what you are about to live! **(Grisel Tapia Claudio)**



I hope your summer was fun or as you wanted it to be. My name is Ahmad Nahas. I took this class 2016-2017, and for sure it was one of my favorite classes. If you're nervous and might be thinking of dropping this class already, let me tell you how

this class went for me, a foreign student who barely spoke English. At first, it was fast and hard for me to catch up. . . .With time, this class helped me to improve my English. It also helped me with my social life. It taught me to be an active and very outgoing person, to make lots of friends. As time passed by, I realized that it was only fast for me because of my



very minimal English. I caught up and was steady with it throughout the whole year. I didn't think you could really be close to your classmates, but everything in this class seemed to be running smoothly. Now I have the confidence to speak my thoughts and to use better vocabulary.

When I came to America, I knew what I wanted to study, but taking this class I was encouraged to not just be a doctor but to use my knowledge to make this world a better place. Taking this class felt like home, having all these people to motivate you throughout, people who are willing to move forward with you to a better place and become a better person. This class showed me that I wasn't alone in this journey. I'm thankful to be in this class, and I hope you will feel the same when you're writing this paper [your letter to the Class of 2019] and keeping the tradition moving. **(Ahmad Nahas)**



I want to say hello, and welcome to the class of 2018. I'm happy to get to share with you what this class will be like for you. I hope you are ready to have a whole bunch of fun! I learned a lot from this class, and I made a lot of memories. I would advise that you don't be afraid to ask for help. I can

honestly tell you that I have never read so many books in just one year. All thanks to Odyssey for recommending the books we read. If you don't like to read, that will change. You will like the books that they choose for us to read. It feels cool to read books . . . **(Musab Naji)**



I just want to let you know there will be days when you feel like giving up, but don't. You have a great support around you that

wants to see you better your life for yourself or your family. I myself almost gave up because it was so much. I was trying to balance it all with a baby and life circumstances as well. For me this program was the light at the end of my tunnel. Keep your heart open for change and your mind open to learn new, challenging things. During this journey, you will learn more about yourself than you ever knew before. Remember to always look past how hard homework or classwork is. Instead of giving up, embrace it. This is your journey; embrace every heartache, happiness, and long night. Be open with your classmates. They will be there to help you through a lot as well. I hope you all have a wonderful year. It goes by fast. **(Simone Bell-Perdue)**



Get ready to go on the best, eye-opening, motivational journey. When you walk into the class, you'll question if you belong here, but I swear, give it a few weeks, and you will go from strangers to family.

Everyone will become your support system. They will encourage you when you feel discouraged. When you look around, you'll see that you can trust everybody in this room. The best advice I can give you is to come to every class. Always stay on top of your work. If you are feeling stressed, talk to someone. Everyone is here to help you grow and push you towards your future. Have fun! **(Kendra Atkinson)**



You are about to embark on the kick-start of achieving your dreams which you will discover for yourselves. I

will just tell you to walk through that door every Wednesday, and at some point along the line, you will find yourself, your passion, your way. Hold on to every week dearly because before you know it, it's all over. Graduation is right around the corner.

You are privileged to be taken care of by the most amazing people who will test your skills, introduce you to new things, empower you, and empathize with you.

You will also be tutored every week, and your minds will be bent by Coach's Mindbenders. Have fun, ladies and gentlemen! **(Sukai Yarbo)**



Congratulations on being accepted into the Odyssey Program. This is the first day of the rest of your life. Like any new journey, there will be trials, unforeseen hardships, and obstacles, but I can guarantee that if you hang in there and keep coming to class in spite of them, it

will be well worth it. The strength that you'll draw from your classmates, the support your instructors will give, and the knowledge you'll obtain will be a well of wisdom that will carry you throughout the years to come. No matter what, don't give up, keep the end goal in mind, and be open to trying new things. You will get through this, so hang in there, and God bless. Remember that the only way to fail is if you give up. **(Avé Thorpe)**



Welcome to this special classroom. Welcome to the most amazing Odyssey of your life. In this classroom, I found amazing people that appreciated me and cared about me. I also found friends, friends

that felt scared, anxious, excited, and sad in this room, but we all survived. Whatever your goal in life is, make sure this class is one of them. Every Wednesday, every class is unique and you will learn something new every week. Make sure your homework is done every week because catching up is hard. There is a reason for every assignment given to you, so make sure you read them. Odyssey is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so make sure you enjoy every single thing.

Make sure you are ready for the Mindbender. Coach is an amazing teacher, and he will make you learn new words every week. Emily will be here for you; she will explain, and she will tell you what she expects from you, but don't panic: there are lots of people to help you. Kevin will help you with anything you need, he will listen to you, and together you are going to find an answer to whatever the problem is. You will also learn a lot from amazing teachers: Jean Feraca, Craig Werner and Gene Phillips. What these amazing people are going to teach you I won't tell you; you've got to find it out for yourself.

Enjoy every single minute. Even when you feel that it's too much, don't give up; believe in yourself. Nothing is impossible. If I did it, you can do it, too. **(Belem Calixto)**

As I move on to other educational opportunities, I want you to know how lucky you are to be in this life-changing program. The Odyssey program is a labor of love for Emily and her staff. You will feel love, hope, and support as a



student. You must know that being an Odyssey student is a privilege for a few, unique individuals. Working with Emily and her staff provides a bridge to accomplish your goals and find success, whatever that

might mean for you.

Don't be fooled into thinking that Odyssey is not a challenging program. Your studies will provide a journey for you to open your eyes to sights and ears to sounds you didn't know were there. You will learn that education is a key to success. However, you must stay focused on your assignments. You will have to keep up with your weekly readings and writings. At times, it will feel stressful, but opening your brain to the challenge will prepare you for higher education and maybe help you attend the University of Wisconsin or another college.

If you are accepted in the Odyssey Program, you will learn that Emily and her staff found something special in you. Don't waste this opportunity; grab the knowledge you find all around you. Read and study your assignments and books. Make sure you show up to every class – don't make excuses for yourself. Go to all tutoring opportunities. I know this seems like a lot, but this program is like working towards your bachelor's degree in the humanities. I have found the Odyssey program makes us engaged citizens and smarter and better people. **(Ngina Ali)**



Welcome to the Odyssey Project. No matter how tough it may seem, press your way on. Come to class. Never give up on learning about yourself, your history, dreaming about your future, and making it become a

reality. **(Lawana Diagne)**



Be prepared for a journey. Prepare yourself to laugh, to cry, and to be taken aback. Prepare yourself to be captivated. This was more than just a class; on Wednesday, I knew I had a safe haven. I

came to a place that offered me comfort and knowledge. I came in with nothing to lose.

You have to put yourself in a path to be who you want to be, to do what you want to do and to excel. Be prepared to be mesmerized and to find that you are not much different from Plato or Socrates. Do not take this course lightly, as what you are expecting will be totally different. **(Felica Thomas)**



First, let me say it was a treat to be a part of Odyssey 2016/17. I've had my share of setbacks and trials during this time. However, I can say I've grown so much. I've gotten to know and share my journey with my classmates. We've

had several positive discussions about current events and tied them to the works of Socrates, Whitman, Blake, Chopin, Shakespeare, and many others. You will be exposed to so many forsaken art forms. You will get to visit the Chazen Museum and get to complete your own personal inventory of the works, from various eras of art history. You will develop and appreciate the humanities, reading, and writing. It is indeed a terrific opportunity you will never forget. **(Spencer Gamble)**

Welcome to the beginning of this revolving door to your future. No matter what, don't give up; breathe



and take it all in. Take every opportunity to discuss your next step after Odyssey. The entire experience will help you open up who you are and what you want to be.

Odyssey is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. I now look forward to the rest of my "odyssey." Let your odyssey guide you!! Be the inner rock star you are!

**(Alyanna Cooper)**



Let me say, "welcome." Odyssey is your step to a brighter future, whether you are pursuing a career in higher education or seeking personal gain.

I love the alternative style that Emily, Kevin, Coach, and all the other instructors use to help us learn and practice what we learn. You will enjoy this class to the fullest. The kindness and unconditional help you get from this class will never be forgotten. Wallow and soak up all the different ideas and perspectives you get from your classmates. Learn from each other. Be the future of the United States of America. **(Joy Bally)**





Ready, set, buckle up your seatbelt. You are in for an exciting new odyssey. I know too well that gut-wrenching feeling that you are all having, walking into a room full of 30 plus new people with different views, backgrounds,

beliefs, and religions. This is what makes Odyssey so great. Soon you will build close relationships with one another. Odyssey will become your home away from home, your escape. You will yearn for Wednesdays to roll around to discuss the homework from last week. My advice to you is that when you are going through hard times outside of school, don't give up! Emily and Kevin will be your shoulder to cry on. They believe in you and want you to succeed. Take advantage of Kevin. Don't hesitate to talk about your thoughts and ideas. Kevin will help you bring your ideas to life.

Brace yourself for the odyssey to come. Before you know it, May will be here, and you will be writing your letter to the class of 2019. Congratulations, and welcome to the Odyssey family. **(Asha Green)**



I would like to congratulate you because if you are reading this, it is because you are very lucky, and now you are a part of this amazing family. Odyssey has been the best thing that ever happened to me. In here I learned things that schools

don't teach. I get all the help I need, and the most important thing is that Odyssey helps me to feel that it's possible to be whatever I want to be. I'm sure you will find many wonderful things that are priceless. I recommend you to force yourself to do the assignments because you'll be surprised at the things you are capable of creating.

Make sure to use the resources and the tutors



because Odyssey has the best tutors and the best team to help you on whatever you need. When my kids are in the childcare they provide, I don't feel guilty doing my homework because I know they are having fun. Congratulations and make us proud of your success. **(Marisol Gonzalez)**



Dear Class of 2018, don't stop looking forward. Whatever brought you to this moment needs to remain a focal point in your decision making. This beautiful opportunity is our construction project, so grab the gloves and hammers because there's work to

be done. Demolish those walls of fear and the ceilings of doubt, pull weeds from the garden of your mind, and dig deep to find the resolve to see this through. Build pillars that support your aspirations, open up that floor space to learn something new, but remember to save room for the library of memories you'll gather along the way. When the paint dries and you stand in front of your accomplishment, what will you see? Ask yourself and apply the answer to this year and even everyday life. We are the foremen of our future, so let's get to it! **(Anthony Jefferson)**



# ALUMNI CORNER

## I LOVE ODYSSEY

BY JUANITA WILSON '07



I love Odyssey because before Odyssey I always felt like an outsider when I was among a group of people. I now feel that I can contribute to the conversation and feel that I am no longer a slow learner. I feel that I can accomplish whatever I set out to do. I am happy most of the time now.

I am going to be a lifelong learner.

I feel that I am not alone anymore if I need help with a problem. I feel that I am loved by my teachers and classmates. I feel that life is beautiful this year and the rest of my life because of Odyssey. I feel that there will always be help available to me. I feel blessed.

## I LOVE MY WEBSTER'S

BY TOSUMBA WELCH '13

**I love my Webster's** with a great passion and sense of dependency. Webster's has never stood me up, let me down, or led me astray—never! It tells me secrets that sometimes no one else can even imagine. One time I was walking through a path of words and there were blank spots on the path. Out of nowhere, Webster's replaced those blank spots with words, and I was able to continue my walk.

Webster's sat me down one night and gave me an idea that landed me second place in an essay contest answering the question "Why Vote?" I have never known Webster's to be anything but perfect. Webster's has given me 230,000 reasons to be in love with it. I love my Webster's.



# DON'T QUIT

BY JOE ROBINSON '04

My advice to the new Odyssey class is don't quit. No matter how hard it gets, don't quit.

When you get off work at 5:30, and you only have 30 minutes to get the kids situated and get to class, don't quit.

When you get stuck in the middle of writing a paper or doing a project, don't quit.

When you find out that your father has cancer and has to have surgery and treatment, don't quit.

When you have circumstances that occur that make you miss a class and you get behind on your work, don't quit.

When you feel as if you're not getting anything out of a particular subject, don't quit. When people tell you you are wasting your time, don't quit. When your car breaks down, and it's twenty below outside, and the only way to get here is on the city bus, don't quit. When your spouse is complaining that your five children are driving her crazy every Wednesday night, don't quit. When one of your

classmates makes you feel stupid for voicing your opinion, don't quit. When your boyfriend or girlfriend accuses you of cheating on them because you had to turn your cell phone off during class, don't quit.

And if you get to the point where you just can't find any more motivation to force yourself to keep coming to this class, my advice is to call Emily, and I guarantee you that she won't let you quit! There were many times that I wanted to just give up, but Emily would not let me. She believed in us more than some of us believed in ourselves.

Finally, I would like to say that, the first couple of weeks, I was in class trying to figure out, what is the catch? Why are these people offering us this course for free? There must be a catch. I found out what the catch was. Each one of the teachers was trying to trick us into believing that our lives would somehow be better if we completed this Odyssey class and then go on to graduate from college. I guess I must be a little naïve, because I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker.



*Joe Robinson with classmate Tineisha Scott, who earned her Master's Degree at Edgewood College*



*Joe Robinson with his family*

# WE ATE DOG FOOD

BY ALICE MCDANIEL '09

WRITTEN FOR KEVIN MULLEN'S ODYSSEY ALUMNI COMPOSITION CLASS



... You can only write about what you feel and know really. I know that my mom was not a high school graduate, but no one else would have known that unless she told you herself. She was a very well-versed, super-intelligent, beautiful, spiritual, and loving woman.

My dad, on the other hand, could hardly read or write. He has lived most of his life with those limitations. He is a very funny, kind-hearted, spiritual, and good-looking man.

While in the care of my dad, my four other siblings and I ate dog food. That is what we were told some years later, and our mom confirmed that story. You are probably wondering how that happened. Well, I will tell you what we have been told.

My dad went to the grocery store. He was in the canned goods section, or so he thought. He looked at the picture on the can of some corn beef hash. "Ha, ha!" he said and grabbed it.

When my mom arrived home from work, she asked him if we

had eaten yet. His reply was "Yes." My mom asked him, "What did you feed the children?" He said, "some hash." For those of you who have never eaten it and never want to, hash, according to Webster's Dictionary, comes from the French *hacher*, to chop, and means "to chop up meat and vegetables for cooking; usually a baked mixture, a muddled mess." She asked him again, "What did you say you fed them?" My dad replied again, "Hash. The cans are in the trash can."

My mom went to the trash can. As she lifted each of the cans out, she screamed at my dad, "You fool! You gave my children dog food, with your, 'no reading' ass!" It goes without saying, that he was not asked to go shopping for groceries again.

My parents didn't have the opportunity to complete their education due to obstacles. My dad was from the small town of Stamps, Arkansas. By the age of four, his mom was now a single parent. His father had left them. As the oldest of her two sons, he was now the man of the house. He went to school on a regular basis only up to the third grade. He had to work in the fields, either having to stay home or be pulled from his class at school whenever it was time for crops to be harvest.

***We ate dog food,  
but we were rich.***



Mother was from a large family of eleven and also from Arkansas. She got to go to school every day until she met my dad. With her parents' permission, they got married a year later.

They moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin several years later along with their two daughters. During their marriage they had some economic struggles. It was not for lack of ambition and determination and drive. Both of them would work—Dad as a laborer and Mom as a waitress or maid. I remember she would wear a black and white uniform when she rode the bus to

the eastside of the city where the rich people lived. . . .

Both of my parents instilled in their children that we should do our best at whatever we chose to do in life. "'Can't' is not a word," my mother would say. We could not use it at all as an excuse or reason not to go for things in life, like getting an education. . . .

Education is the key to freedom, to advancing your world. Wealth is not only of material and financial means; it is also knowledge.

We ate dog food, but we were rich.

# ODYSSEY POEM

## BY ANTHONY JEFFERSON '17

Odyssey is the pencil of life with which we can erase past regrets and rewrite our future.

Every "word" formed solidifies our resolve, those periods at the end a proud stamp of success.

Sentence by sentence, we forge a new tale.



# SPECIAL ODYSSEY MOMENTS



Odyssey Project receives award at Chancellor Becky Blank's house; Teresa Tellez-Giron '04 receiving 2014 YWCA Woman of Distinction Award; Urban farmer and genius grant winner Will Allen with Nicki Cooper '16; former UW Chancellor Biddy Martin flanked by Madison Police officers Anthony Ward '04 and Corey Saffold '06; Class of 2014 students featured on Capital City Hues cover.





TV personality Tavis Smiley and scholar Cornel West taking Odyssey students out to dinner during their Poverty Tour; Tosumba Welch '13 winning Best Actor award from the Bartell Theatre; scholar Henry Louis Gates '04 with Kegan Carter '04 and Josephine Lorya Ozulamoi '08; Yolanda King (daughter of the late Martin Luther King, Jr.) with Emily Auerbach, Juanita Wilson '07, Pamela Holmes '04, and Denise Maddox '04; author Jelissa Edwards '16 on cover of BRAVA Magazine.