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ODYSSEY ORACLE

INTRODUCING THE CLASS OF 2019



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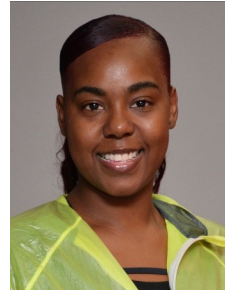
Muhammad
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Juan Carlos
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Teresa
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Ebony
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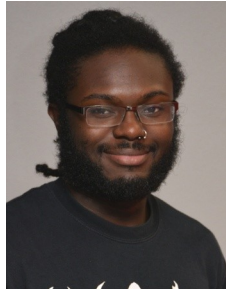
Erica
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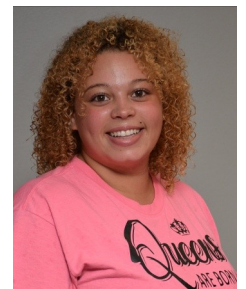
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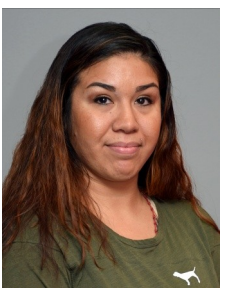
J. Luis
Pérez-Olgún



Savannah
Perry



Cheyenne
Pete



Alice
Ramirez



Abdourahman
Sallah



Hezouwe
Walada



NatuRa
Warford



La'cee
Webster



Sandra
Zintzun

FEELINGS ON JOINING ODYSSEY

Students in the new Class of 2019 were asked, "How did you feel when you learned you were accepted into the UW Odyssey Project?"



Now is the time for me to reach my goals and objectives. Getting accepted into this project is the first step in the 1000-mile journey of completing my post-secondary education. **(Muhammad Abdullah)**



I felt excitement and other feelings that I can't describe but mostly happiness to begin a new journey. **(Juan Carlos Abrajan)**



I was very excited. I have tried to get into this class for years. The third time is the charm, I've heard. **(Teresa Alston)**



Good to meet new people and hopeful for a great school year. **(Ebony Anderson-Carter)**



I felt important, like I had a second chance to get a better education. **(Kayasia Blake)**



I cried, feeling overjoyed about being selected. **(Carmon Caire)**

Overwhelmed and overjoyed! I cried (happy tears 😊)!! **(Quishanta Cary)**

I was extremely excited after hearing that I had been accepted because this is the beginning of getting my education started! **(Diamond Clay)**

I felt honored. I thought I had not been chosen and kind of had forgotten about it. When I received the phone call, I was excited and felt like a door had opened for me. **(Queeneice Creamer)**

I was happy and scared. **(Tchallassi Edoh)**



I was excited. I've been wanting to start back school for quite some time. **(Erica Gentry)**

I felt relieved and excited to start a new chapter in my life that can potentially lead me to the path of obtaining a degree. I felt proud in knowing I'd made a decision to better my life and the lives of my children. **(Zataiya Gober)**



Excited and hopeful because I know I have a chance to be a better me and strengthen my skills. **(Breonna Hawkins)**

I felt great. I really wanted a chance to get back into the groove of taking classes. I'm really happy that I have been given the opportunity to experience a college course and learn. **(James Horton Jr.)**



I felt great. I felt I have another chance to prove to myself I can be something other than the woman who had kids young.

(Candace Howard)

I was so very excited. I first heard my home answering machine after doing my volunteer work at the Beacon Day Shelter. I was smiling from ear to ear. Then three days later, Mrs. Emily sent me a letter in the mail, very detailed. I immediately called my children, grandchildren, and all my church members and friends. **(Joyce Johnson)**



I felt so lucky to have been accepted into the Odyssey Program. **(Yangchen Llamo)**

The day I received the letter from Emily my day was brightened. I also have a lot of anxiety to learn new things and meet the staff. **(Ricardo Marroquin Santos)**



I felt overjoyed, happy, and nervous. My reason for this is because it's been so long since I've been in a classroom setting. It's been so long since I focused on my education, and now I have the chance to work on a goal that has been so important to me. **(Galeca McCain)**



The first time that I received an acceptance letter from Odyssey, I was excited but was diagnosed with cancer about a week later. I reached out to Emily right away. She promised me a spot in a later class. HERE I AM! **(Monica Mims)**





Excited!! (**Martina Mitchell**)

I felt a rush of excitement! I also was somehow scared to start this journey, but I know and believe in myself. That gives me a lot of motivation to finish this program. I feel grateful to be part of it.

(**J. Luis Pérez-Olgún**)



Overwhelmed with happiness and joy, and ready to start new beginnings (**Savannah Perry**)

Excitement! I've been waiting for the chance to get back into school, and this is my opportunity. 😊

(**Cheyenne Pete**)

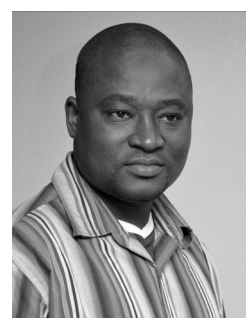


AMAZING! I couldn't believe I had been chosen. It was a feeling of disbelief and joy all put together. I felt proud. (**Alice Ramirez**)



I felt excited about the news. That is because I've always been determined to learn.

(**Abdourahman Sallah**)



When I learned that I had been accepted, I was so excited because it was a good opportunity for me to get into the UW. (**Hezouwe Walada**)



I was so excited, emotional, and proud! I screamed in Emily's ear for almost two minutes straight (sorry 😊)!

(**NatuRa Warford**)



I was very excited and honored. . . . I had been on the waiting list so I am happy to be here and be part of something so moving, just from hearing all of the personal ties people have with the Odyssey Program and what it means to me. (**La'cee Webster**)



I was very excited. After a rough two years, I was looking forward to good things and good news for me and my kids. (**Sandra Zintzun**)



SENTENCES ABOUT US



I have nine children from four marriages and 16 grandchildren, and I currently am a single parent of a 15-year-old daughter. I work 20 hours a week in Heaven on earth: The Central Library. My hobbies are

collecting music, books, and film.

(Muhammad Abdullah)



I have a four-year-old daughter, whom I love to do make up and go to the movies with. I work overnight as a CNA, and I am finishing my apprenticeship for cosmetology. I love to sing but only for my clients and

daughter and when I am in the shower.

(Ebony Anderson-Carter)



I am a father of one boy and two girls and am expecting another girl. I like playing soccer, but I got a knee injury. I tore one of my meniscuses, so I stopped playing for two years.

Now I am trying to play again. I

accomplished one of my main goals last November 2017, and that was to become a homeowner. **(Juan Carlos Abrajan)**



I come from a huge family, with 51 cousins only from my mom's 11 siblings. I've had over 20 jobs. I love to sing to myself.

(Kayasia Blake)



I am a family person who values all my loved ones. My family is #1. I enjoy cooking, singing, bowling, relaxing, and spending time with family #1. I love Winnie the Pooh and Paddington Bear. I collect any

and all items possible. I love children. Teaching is my passion of 22 years.

(Carmon Caire)



I have two children and one grandbaby, and I am proud of them all. I love to write, sing, and play Scrabble. I love long walks in the park, shopping, and playing tennis and basketball sometimes. I have all

sorts of plants, and I have a love for birds, especially white doves. **(Teresa Alston)**



I was in several car accidents. The first one I had messed up the whole left side of my back. I found out once I moved up here that I have a permanent brain injury. Because I messed up my entire left side back and

because of my size and height, my doctor told me that I'd die if I had any children. I had my very first and only child, named Blessing Jean Genenia Norris. I lost both my parents and oldest sister. I never want to get married because they physically won't be there.

(Quishanta 'Quin' Cary)





My family is my motivation to want more. I love to be involved in life--the changes, powerful movements, and anything that gets me away from negativity. I will never give up. **(Diamond Clay)**



I have a two-year-old son, and I almost died during complications after his birth. This is my third time attempting to go back to school. I have five brothers. I am the only girl, and I'm the oldest.

(Queeneice Creamer)



I am a mother of four sweet and charming girls—Hannah-kay, Joyce, Juanita, and Jordyn—who make my life fun. I miss home a lot because I have my parents back there [in Togo] and they need care.

Please keep them in our prayers with me.

(Tchallassi Edoh)



I have three children and three stepchildren. I got married last year and moved to Wisconsin from Jackson, Tennessee. I love listening to Maze and Frankie Beverly. The group relaxes me, and I vibe really well to their songs. I love taking care of people, kids—

whoever needs help. **(Erica Gentry)**



I was born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. I have four children—three sons (ages 10, 5, and 2), and one daughter (age 6). I get to help shape young minds every day as a childcare worker, and I have been doing so since 2007! **(Zataiya Gober)**



I am 22 years old with no children and three sisters. I used to work as a machine operator making cast for Harley Davidson. I love otters, and my favorite color is blue.

(Breonna Hawkins)



I play rugby and played for the Wisconsin State team in a high school tournament held in Colorado when I was a sophomore. I was a member of a jazz, neo-soul, hip-hop band called SoulMen. I was a lyricist,

kind of like Black Thought to the Roots. I was an intern at the Madison Public Library helping Rob Dz run the media academy—teaching teens how to record and write music, how to record a music video, how to brand and promote yourself, and lastly how music can be turned into social activism.

(James Horton Jr.)



I am a single mother of six children. I'm working two jobs right now—server at Ho-Chunk Casino and Care Specialist at Sylvan Crossing. I love to sing and dance in my free time. I write music. **(Candace Howard)**



I have three adult children and nine grandchildren that all live in Garland, Texas. I fled to Madison from Garland to leave a 21-year marriage to an abusive husband who broke my heart. Now I've found peace and hope for a

brighter future now that I've been accepted to jumpstart schooling in the Odyssey Project. I am eager and set a goal to get a bachelor's degree in the humanities. I am 68 years old now in 2018. Even if I'm 71 years old in 2021 or 72 years old in 2022, I am determined to be a "go-getter" and get the education I long desired when I was young, naïve, and vulnerable. I left my hometown of Chicago, Illinois, where I was born and raised, and moved to Atlanta, Georgia. I was only 25 years old, and I dropped out of Georgia State University when I met my second child's father. I want to correct that mistake.

(Joyce Johnson)



I came to the USA with \$100 in my purse and not knowing whether I would see my family after that. I have enjoyed working as long as it paid my bills. I am now in Madison College as a first year Nursing student. **(Yangchen Llamo)**



I am from Mexico City, Mexico. I am the youngest of three siblings. I emigrated in 2001, and my family decided to settle in Madison, Wisconsin. At one time I had three dogs. One was a rescue dog named Blanco, an American

Eskimo dog, and two shelties named Charlie and Abby. Charlie passed away on August 30. I love animals, and I love playing and watching sports. **(Ricardo Marroquin Santos)**

Usually when someone asks me to tell them something about myself I simply reply back, "I'm



friendly, hardworking, dependable!" but that's just a list. . . . I'm 26 years old and come from a loving family. I'm the oldest of four. Growing up I have always had my parents and

siblings. Yes, we struggled, but

through it all, we stuck together. . . . As time has passed, I've lost my way, which is perfectly fine because I'm aware that each situation that I've been through is what really made me who I am today. Losing my first child, who was only 11 days old, has made me stronger than I was before. If I can live this life without my daughter, I can overcome any challenges. Because of this tragic event, I started to depend on God more than usual. I believe that not only God but my now angel Za'mour knew I was suffering from stress and depression, so they sent me a bundle of joy, Zoelle, my nine-month-old daughter who has brought so much joy to my life. However, with joy pain is not far behind. No one plans to be a single mother, which is how I learned to be patient and understanding, I work at a call center with the goal of continuing my education and also becoming a social worker! Each day I'm learning new things about myself, and each day I test my strength. **(Galeca McCain)**



I love to write, especially poetry. I'm very "crafty"—my daughter and I make most of our gifts and greeting cards. I have a twin sister named Monique. **(Monica Mims)**



I have three children all in different schools—elementary, middle, and high school. I teach Sunday School for the little kiddos and have been with my church for ten years. I love God, learning, and my mommy. **(Martina Mitchell)**



I love dancing. I used to teach salsa and bachata. Also, I dance in a Mexican Folklore group. Dancing is in my blood. I do like and play a little bit of guitar. I enjoy playing soccer and volleyball. As a kid, I played baseball. I love camping, backpacking, hiking, being by the lake, and exploring and going to parks to hike! **(J. Luis Pérez-Olguín)**



I've lived a long hard life of pain and lies! I am a young, independent 21 year old with a 30-year-old boyfriend. I live alone with no kids. I lost the most important thing/person to me (my father), and I'm still battling the pain! **(Savannah Rose Perry)**



I have nine brothers and two sisters, two twin nieces and another one on the way, a nephew, and a lot of cousins. My family is big. I plan to visit each state at least once in my lifetime because I absolutely love to travel and see the world. My favorite animal is a tiger. **(Cheyenne Pete)**



I'm a single mom of two amazing boys, nine and four. They are my world. I love to travel and explore different parts of the world with my boys. It's my favorite thing to do. I have a deep passion for helping and working for people with disabilities.

(Alice Ramirez)



My worst day in my life was the day when I lost my mum, and my dad was a thousand miles away from home. I have two cows, one goat, and a dog that gave birth to four puppies. I came to the Odyssey class with an open mind and with excitement, and I hope to make friends in a couple of weeks with the Class of 2019. **(Abdourahman Sallah)**



I have a daughter and a wife who is 20 inches shorter than I am. My two worst jobs were bussing tables and going out at 5 AM to fetch water. I have a music keyboard called "Yamaha Fanton x 6" that I try to play when I am angry. **(Hezouwe Walada)**



I have three adult children and three grandchildren, and I was the guardian of my two nieces for seven years. I have a natural talent for making music. It comes, and if I don't record it, I lose the beat and lyrics. I have been a school bus attendant for three years and love working with my students. **(NatuRa Warford)**



I have a freckle in my left eye and my right is smaller. I love music and writing. Being able to express yourself through both and really touch those who read/listen is so powerful. I am very opinionated, so if my writing or music were to move people, I'd feel happy and accomplished. I am the only child and love it. I like my solitude! **(La'cee Webster)**



I was raised by my aunt and uncle in a household of 16 people. I started working as a migrant worker at a very young age in tobacco fields and sod farms. I'm a single mom of two boys, who I've supported by working up to four jobs with help from my family. I love my job working with patients at a community clinic for the past ten years. **(Sandra Zintzun)**

ARE YOU A WRITER?



Yes, I am a reader, and I enjoy expressing myself on paper.

My elementary and secondary education was dismal. I began to enjoy reading and learning after reading *The Autobiography of*

Malik Shabazz.

I never had good penmanship when it came to cursive. I became a writer when I became computer literate and took a keyboarding class circa 1999. Prior, I had computer phobia; now I cannot imagine life without a computer.

(Muhammad Abdullah)



I am not sure if I am a writer or not, but if I have to choose I'll say yes. I have a problem trying to write. I don't know how to explain what I want to say. I have a problem with my spelling. It's been a long time since I wrote a

story, an essay, so saying this I'll change my answer and say I am not a writer, but with practice and homework I might become one.

(Juan Carlos Abrajan)



I love to write because it expresses your feelings sometimes more than speaking.

I use a lot of small words. I have learned today it's because of how you learned when you were a kid.

See, I learned something already.

I was always good at spelling. Scrabble is one of my favorite games to play. I read my Bible daily. So words are very important to me.

I remember in college I wrote an article on feelings, and my professor was moved by it. He made me read it to the class. (That scared the crap out of me.) **(Teresa Alston)**



I love to write. When I write, I feel like I can be whoever I want—a politician, a feminist, an old man. I can put myself in the shoes of others and express my feelings as if I were that person.

I also used to perform poetry with UW's Youth Speaks. I would love to go back to my high school and talk to others about poetry and help teens become more confident.

(Ebony Anderson-Carter)

I use writing as a way to escape the world.



I do consider myself a writer. Throughout life, I use writing as a way to escape the world or just have a place to copy down my thoughts without judgment, a place I can come back to and reflect on my experiences.

I can only recall my bad experience when my mother snooped in my room and found a diary of mine. In there were ill feelings about my life and how she had sometimes negatively impacted that. I used some choice words that as a mom she didn't appreciate, but I knew she was more hurt by what I said. I would never want her or anyone else to be hurt by the words I say because there are multiple ways to express pain without inflicting it on others.

(Kayasia Blake)



A friend of mine put a restraining order on her son's father. She asked me if I would do her a favor and write a letter for her to take to court to lift the restraining order and I did. She went to court, and the next day we met. She said that

letter lifted the restraining order, and she treated me to dinner. I felt proud and blessed!

(Carmon Caire)



I do consider myself a writer for the simple fact, besides reading, that I LOVE to write. That's really all I like to do. I have different journals that I just write whatever in, like poems, stories, stuff that just doesn't make any sense. Back

in high school, I was on the Newspaper Committee. In college in Chicago, I had my very own article where I wrote about different types of religions, interviewed tons of people, and wrote about and did research on things people wouldn't dare write nor touch on!

[To get into Odyssey], I just wrote from the heart on why I would really want to be part of a wonderful and fantastic program. I love meeting a lot of new people, learning so much from them, including alumni that used to attend and then graduated. I want to learn from ALL the professors and Ms. Emily. **(Quishanta Cary)**



When I think about writing there are three words that come to mind: enthusiasm, freedom, and voice—being able to speak (on paper), express, and really break down what thoughts I may have about the subject under

discussion. I LOVE being able to write and really go into detail. I LOVE having a large variety of things to say, words to use. I consider myself a

writer because no matter what the topic is about, whether I am familiar with it or not, I make a way to write about it. I like to think that my brain is very magical when it comes to writing—being able to really define my thoughts and ideas, using unique wording, and getting my point across.

Growing up I had a diary. I wrote everything in it, from liking boys, how mad someone made me, to checking in with myself, etc. It was private and it was MY life. Then my dad and stepmom once violated my privacy by opening up my diary and reading my secrets, reading my thoughts and my life events. . . . They laughed at things, and then they tried to punish me for the vocabulary I used. Growing up, I was very ANGRY. . . . Writing took the pain away and helped with closure, helped me find a way out of that anger and hatred.

In school, my teachers always complimented my writing, both the penmanship and the actual writing pieces. I was known to be a strong writer.

I wrote with dedication and a purpose. I've been writing poetry since I was in elementary school. I was very blessed to have met Maya Angelou. She really motivated me by saying "there's no such thing as a bad piece." To me, that meant no matter what you write, if it has a meaning to YOU that's all that matters.



After my parents took my diary, I stopped writing and just started to hold things in, and I find myself very angry again. I am hoping I can get back to writing again and finding my inner peace! **(Diamond Clay)**



I'm not really sure if I would consider myself a writer. I know that when I do write, if it is not something that I am interested in I will get stuck and not do my best. In a past

course, I remember writing about some of the trials and tribulations I have endured in my life. I think this gave my instructor a sense of who I really am because everyone has a story to tell. **(Queeneice Creamer)**

Everyone has a story to tell.

outlet to express yourself. Often it is easier for me to

express my thoughts and opinions through writing versus speaking or verbal communication.

When I write, it gives me the opportunity to think about what I want to say before my audience receives it. That is something that is harder for me to accomplish when speaking. **(Zataiya Gober)**



I am a good writer. When I was in school, all my teachers liked my essays.

But now the language has changed for me: English. Back at school, I never liked my

English class because it was hard, and I keep that in my mind. **(Tchallassi Edoh)**



My feelings about writing are simple. Sometimes I get jumbled with so many thoughts I tend to ramble even though I already explained something fully. I want to learn how to express my feelings in my

writings to where someone else can feel the emotion without having to guess.



I do not like to write. I like to talk. Talking out what I need to write is better for me. My grammar is not perfect when writing, or just putting the words together in a structured sentence.

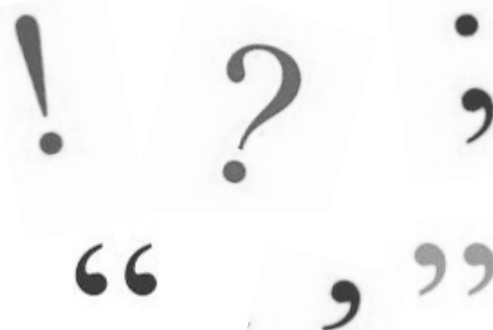
Every time in the past classes I've taken, when I had to write an APA-style paper my stomach would turn into knots. I am my own worst enemy. Even writing this, I'm thinking about how YOU will take this in. Give me a recorder and I'll talk about the whole story. LOL **(Erica Gentry)**

I don't consider myself a writer because I probably have no clue about rules to writing, such as punctuation, which was always my problem in high school. Teachers would always have to correct my commas, semi-colons, etc., so I wasn't confident when it came to classmates reading my work.

I really haven't had a piece of writing I was proud to show off, and that's something I really want to change by being in this program. **(Breonna Hawkins)**



I believe that I am a pretty good writer. I enjoy writing and thought about studying journalism in high school. To me, writing is a wonderful





I do consider myself a writer. I love writing. My father [James Horton, Odyssey '09] is a poet, so he always made a point of how important reading and writing is.

I used to write poetry daily as a way to express feelings I couldn't convey orally.

I once wrote a poem that I performed in New Orleans as part of a 100 Black Men event. I got a standing ovation once I finished reading my poem. My poem was called "My Blackness" and was about the negative black image that I feel plagues America. To me, there is no greater pleasure than getting applause for raps or poems that I've written. Writing has opened the door for me to understand myself better.

Sometimes writing poetry and music can feel like torture. Maybe that's just because I'm a perfectionist when it comes to writing art, though. Throwing away poems and lyrics constantly, I let the idea of not being good enough stop my pen in its tracks. Even so, I still love writing. (**James Horton, Jr.**)



I don't like writing much because I suck at spelling. I never use the right word or put punctuation in the right place! I used to love to write! I used to write poems as a kid! I lost my way over the years, dropping out of schools, so I'm not as confident as I used to be.

(**Candace Howard**)

Yes, I am a writer. Writing means the world to me because I have a dream and a desire to publish a book. I compile notes, and I have kept



journals ever since my childhood. My book will be mostly about where I was born and raised, how I overcame an abusive marriage, and my goal of graduating from college. (**Joyce Johnson**)



I like writing, and I have always enjoyed reading personal letters and getting the sense of emotion through writing. However, I either do not know how to start or do not have the right words to write. (**Yangchen Llamo**)



I consider myself a seeking writer because I have found out that I can make good stories even though English is my second language. Some experiences I had are feeling dumb about my writing or rushed while reading. I

am very motivated to learn more and improve my writing and reading. (**Ricardo Marroquin Santos**)

Writing is therapeutic



Am I a writer? I believe I am a writer. To me, writing is very therapeutic. With writing, I'm able to express myself, relieve stress. With my writing, I'm a very detailed person. However, even though I enjoy writing, I'm

aware of things I need to work on, such as grammar and spelling. Most of my writing is personal, so I usually keep it to myself. Mostly I can't think of a time when my writing would have opened a door. Maybe because when I write it's about personal things I'm going through, it makes people feel close to me or want to give me a chance like the Odyssey Program! (**Galeca McCain**)



Yes, I'm a writer. Writing is the greatest form of human expression. It can be revisited verbatim.

I write to express my deepest emotions without the fear of anxiety while speaking. I write when I need to clear my mind and when I need to sort my thoughts or just get my ideas out of my head and onto paper to revisit at a later time.
(**Monica Mims**)

Writing is the greatest form of human expression.



I really enjoy writing! Although I have never thought of myself as a writer, it seems as though reading and writing go hand in hand. What I love to do the most is read. Once in church we were challenged to choose a book in the

Bible and in our own words write what it means to us. I chose to write about the Book of Ruth, and I won the trophy!! The pastor said he could really feel where I was coming from, and I liked expressing my feelings. (**Martina Mitchell**)



I was never the best at writing, and growing up going to school I wasn't an avid writer. However, I was always able to do my homework assignments. When I was doing my Associate's, I found myself writing assignments for

some of my classes, which gave me the opportunity to learn that I was not bad at writing.

Some of the cons with writing are the barrier of language and the time it takes me to write a paper, as well as being somewhat perfectionistic. Another con was growing up or going to school, I had teachers that were stricter and forced us to do it in a not so fun way. (**J. Luis Pérez-Olgún**)



I believe I am a writer! I always loved to write when I was younger and when I'm down to relieve some stress. I believe I could be one of the greats. My vocabulary just isn't its best—well, it's very bad—, and the fact is that I just

didn't pay attention in school so my knowledge is low! That's why I'm blessed to be here to begin this wonderful journey! (**Savannah Rose Perry**)



I do consider myself a writer. I have many memories in high school writing short stories, poems, and a few creative writing assignments. I've had plenty of good feedback as well as assignments with comments that

showed I could improve. The writing assignment I filled out when I met in person with Emily was an opportunity that could open a new door for me, and luckily it has! I was accepted. I look forward to learning and applying new writing techniques throughout the course. (**Cheyenne Pete**)



Now normally I would say no, I am not a writer, but I think if I have the time and can get over my fear and anxiety, I always have something—a life lesson—I can teach somebody. I've always

been afraid to express myself on paper due to bad spelling and being judged all my life. Once I get comfortable, I believe I will and can get better. **(Alice Ramirez)**



Yeah, I consider myself as a writer. I used to write about politicians and duty bearers for failing to take up their responsibilities as public servants, but sometimes my writings (publications) were met with anger and grievances. Other

times, publications were positive towards them for completing a task. Some of the negative things I wrote about were their corruption and looting of the country's natural resources. **(Abdourahman Sallah)**



I don't consider myself a writer because I don't like it due to the fact that I get stuck when I am writing. I am out of words sometimes.

My positive experience that I have had in school is when I am doing science courses like math, chemistry.

The negative experience that has impacted me was messing up my grades when I was depressed and when I was in a dark place.

I feel happy and more open when I write about my personal life and about my country [Togo]. **(Hesouwe Walada)**

I absolutely love writing. It is my passion along with working with children. As a child I was told I

I've always been afraid to express myself on paper due to bad spelling and being judged all my life.



was a gifted writer. I have a children's book I've written along with poetry.

While serving two years in prison, I entered an art and talent contest, and my poem

"Naturity" (see page 16) was selected and published. I want to learn better technique, editing, grammar, and proper punctuation with my writing. **(NatuRa Warford)**



I do consider myself a writer. In school, writing was always a strength of mine. I'd feel as though I could explain things in so much more detail. I always loved reading books that made me feel I was there because it was so

detailed that I was able to get a clear picture in my mind. I want to be that type of writer! I want to get there and along the way learn about poems, different authors, words. Different ways people express opinions and themselves through writing get your gears going and thinking differently, and that is what I love. My mind is always wondering. I am young, so I really enjoy every aspect! **(La'cee Webster)**



As a young child I could always be found reading a book or working on a piece of art work. I really never considered myself a writer. Being drawn to some of my first readings from Helen Keller and poems by Edgar Allan Poe, I found

myself in a different world. They helped me escape the bad things that surrounded me at the time. Many stories I have yet to tell but really never found a way to put them on paper. I truly believe this class could help me find my voice on paper! **(Sandra Zintzun)**

NATURITY

BY NATURA WARFORD

I was born a child, gifted, vibrant, eager.
Turned adolescent, questioning, searching,
drifting.

A teen soon sad, confused and longing.
Young adult, lost, seemingly trapped and
ready to run.

I ran and ran. Became a product of
nothing.

Used, scattered, broke down and removed from life. Forgotten skills; all hustle.

No love, no desire, no me!

After all this hardship, struggle and pain, I woke up one day....days, months, years later, with my head again hung down and noticed my feet. They were firmly planted on the ground.

I then looked on up to my calves, thighs, my waist and realized my hands were also free.

I was standing on my own. The storm had not knocked me down. I had been spared.

In fact, I felt stronger than ever.

The sun was also there, shining most beautifully. I later found out it had always been, but today I noticed it.

It warmed me. I was ready. I was coming into Naturity.



ALUMNI CORNER

Finding Bearden and Homer in Chicago

By Robert James '14

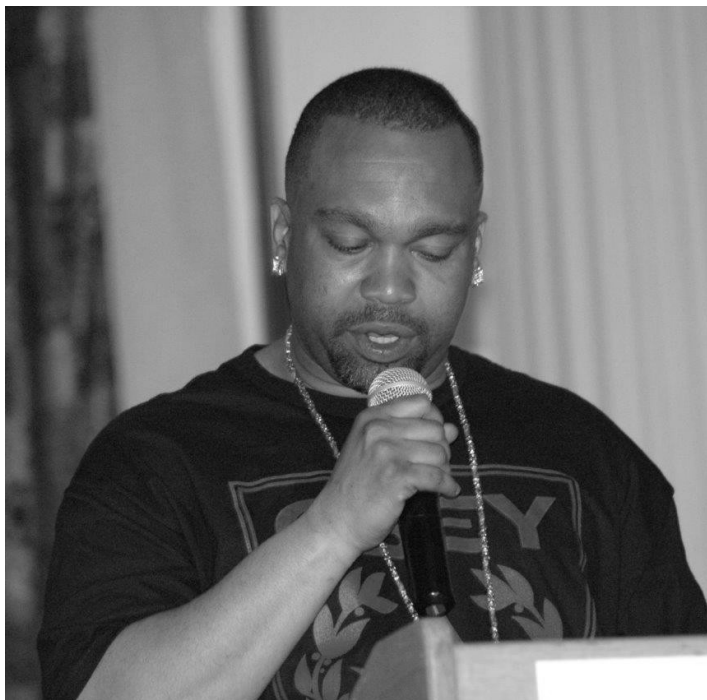
Presented at a symposium on artist Romare Bearden's "Black Odyssey" series

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.

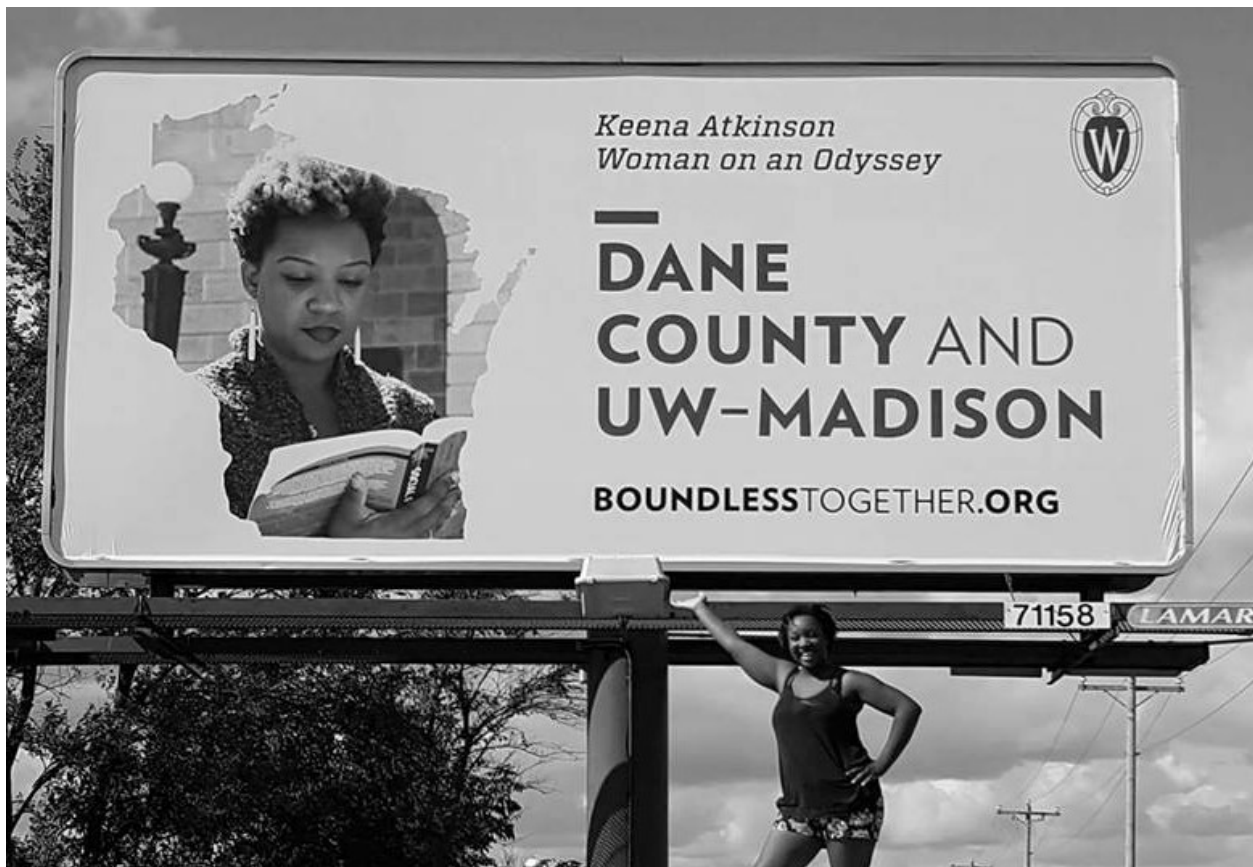
“Toward the end of the Odyssey program, I realized that I didn’t want to be done with school,” she says. That’s when she made a decision to find a way to get a degree at UW-Madison.

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 Behind Bars

By Eugene Smalls '12

It was exciting, and it was exhilarating. The room was electrifying in anticipation. We were all sitting in a circle, and I almost expected Emily to walk up out of the shadows.

There were 40 men at Fox Lake Prison hand-picked by Chaplain Deborah Melchar. There were men from every walk of life. Some were black, some were white, some were lifers, and some were going home in a couple of weeks.

The one thing they all had in common was that they heard about the Odyssey Project, and they wanted in. They said, "Don't leave me out!" All 40 men participated, and all were eager to read out of the Odyssey Course Reader. Everyone turned in their homework and looked forward to reading and discussing the text reading or homework. Never in my life have I seen so many men so eager to participate in a school activity.

The volunteers—what can I say about them? None of them were new to prison, although none were convicted of a crime to get there. All were just as eager to be part of the Odyssey Project behind bars. There was Jean Feraca (one of the founding members of Odyssey), who brought Odyssey into the prisons. Jean has a love for Socrates and "The Allegory of the Cave," and she brings Socrates, Plato, and "The Allegory of the Cave" to life. Then there were Ruth, Janis, Gail, Elizabet, Jerri, and myself (Minister/Chaplain Eugene Smalls), along with Chaplain Deborah Melchar and Activity Director Chuck Gove.

The 49 of us came together in one accord on a commonality: the love of philosophy.

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!"

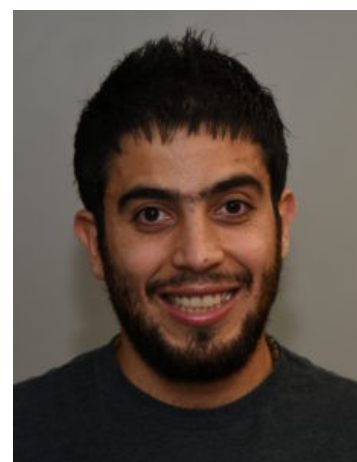
"It was a dream come true, and I felt like I belonged," she says.

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.