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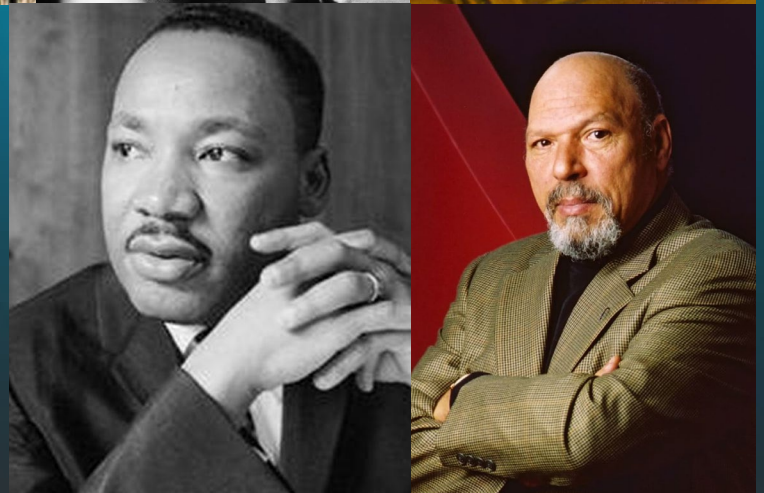
ODYSSEY ORACLE

MAKING A CASE FOR SEMESTER TWO



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MAKING A CASE FOR SEMESTER TWO

At the end of Fall 2020, Odyssey students argued for why they should be allowed to continue into the second half of our two-semester humanities course.



When I began Odyssey, I didn't know how I would do with trying to tackle the world. Being in Odyssey and trying to do my medical assisting has been truly a journey. Even though I feel like I have failed, with nothing being on time, I love the fact that because of the

program I started to pick up books again, whether it's reading with my girls or just picking up a book to clear my mind. Odyssey had really helped me learn to balance things, even though I have a lot of

balancing to do still. I would like to keep on with the program to expand my mind, to keep learning, and to keep writing. What I have gotten out of the program is that my life is truly an odyssey filled with obstacles, but I control how I face them and the outcome.
(Betsy Alfaro)



During this semester, times have been hard. I know many of us have been through something these last couple of months including deaths, COVID-19, and financial situations, and all that made this harder. But one thing that I can say is that

when I was going through my rough patch, this program is something I started to look forward to—Wednesday night classes, the weekly calls from Karen and Brian checking in on me, Emily

reminding me of homework due but also letting me know that it's okay not to be perfect every week! It kept me on my toes and made these life situations easier to bear. Next semester, I want to give you guys a better me, a classmate who talks aloud more, and a student who is more on target with work. I hope this next year and semester are better for me!
(Tawania Alston)

“Writing has sparked a new drive in me.”



Odyssey came right on time. It entered my life at a time when I needed a spark. It has sparked my creativity; I've started writing again. Writing has sparked a new drive in me. I'm more awake than I've been since coming home from prison. Everything I've done since being released has been to keep my freedom. Now I'm thinking about putting a smile on my face; I have Odyssey to thank for that. I'm reading again. Even though for the most part I'm reading what I've been assigned to read, it's some great reading.

Reading for class has inspired me to read for leisure, but the most important thing is I've been inspired to make a change. I wasn't sure if I was ready for school. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to school or what I would go to school for. I'm still not sure if I'm ready. I had a horrible semester. I am sure I want to go to school and sure of the career path that is mine. I want to do social work. I want to be a tool that prevents people from making the bad choices I made, and helping ones who did get on a new track when they are ready. Odyssey has sparked this vision with just one semester. I can only imagine what will happen in the second semester.

(Calvin Balentine)



This beginning year of Odyssey has already given me so much! I can see why the alumni have such awesome stories to share. This semester has shown me that I can be the dedicated, hard-working student I knew I was always capable of being. I commit to my homework and class in a way I never seemed to do in high school. It has changed my views towards learning and school entirely. I feel like I was given the tools to succeed with being in this class. I am so appreciative of having teachers and constant resources I can turn to whenever I need. I bring to Odyssey my positive attitude and plan on bringing it all next semester. Knowing I can accomplish goals against the odds has made me feel like I can do anything I put my mind to. I would love to continue this amazing journey I am on and push myself to new goals. I look forward to soaking in all of second semester and giving you my 100%!
(Sarina Benford)

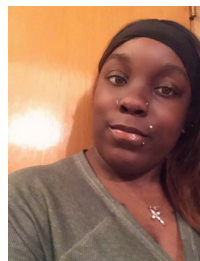


This semester I have surely cracked more than once, doubting, crying, even stopping everything maybe. But I'm still here, and I know I can be very proud of what I've accomplished.

We don't change a team that wins!! Above all, the wonderful teachers and coordinators are a great team.

For the second semester, I'll stay focused as much as possible, I'll think about the purpose of it all, I'll see my goals and projects to the end, and I'll go for it! I am a fighter; I do not let anyone take the place I covet.

In conclusion, I believe in myself, I think positive, I program my mind for success rather than failure, I persevere, and I continue to do my best. **(Souad Bidar)**



I should continue into second semester of the Odyssey Project because writing isn't my strongest, but since this class, I've been learning how to write correctly. I've been able to write about my life, such as the woman of courage paper or the time I showed courage. Not a lot of people know I have been in an abusive relationship, so being able to write about that felt amazing. **(Anjelica Brown)**





I got a lot out of Odyssey first semester. I got something I lacked—it taught me time management and needing to handle deadlines better. I also got out of Odyssey some serious stuff like about art work. I didn't used to try to learn about art work because I thought it was boring, but with Odyssey it made it more fun. I like art a little bit more.

Odyssey also taught me about virtual learning. It is hard for me because I am an in-space learner, but Odyssey is teaching me the art of learning virtually. When I found out Odyssey was going to be virtual, I thought, Wow, this will be hard. I really appreciate that Emily was lenient and compassionate, and she helped me learn that I need to work on time management.

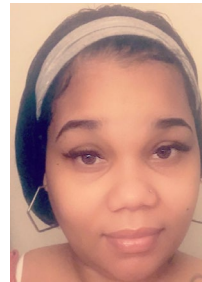
One of the books we read that I really liked was Frederick Douglass. I liked the part about him keeping on going. He had an attitude like I try to have—when I want to do something, like the way he was wanting to learn to read, I need to keep going. Douglass's story was motivational to me because he kept going despite his terrible situation. This pandemic made me want to give up, but when I read Douglass and Malcolm and others, it let me know that they went through so much more than I did but they made it and were successful. If they can do it, I can do it. I'm competitive and that made me want to do more. The pandemic would have made me give up, but our readings made me determined to keep going.

With the Oracles, I learned different people's cultures in my class. I'm from Chicago, and it was cool with our class because we have cultural diversity. It's fun to be in the class. I'm nosy and like to read my classmates' stories about their backgrounds and successes.

I want to continue second semester because (I'm going to be for real) with this pandemic, I NEED to

be in Odyssey because this is my purpose. I've been through so much with this pandemic, but during it one good thing is I found my purpose. I want to be a social worker, so to do that I need to go to school.

I look forward to having Emily say we can be in person one day! Going to school in the pandemic is teaching me how to live, how to slow down. Even though we're still going to be online, I'm looking forward to seeing my classmates. It will help my mental health to see others and interact with them. **(Tisha Butler)**



I'm a very humble, quiet person who can be shy sometimes. I'm more of a listener than a talker. I'm the type of person who feels like I'm failing at certain things and could do better. I had a lack of confidence as far as my education goes. Once I started to gain the experience of being a student

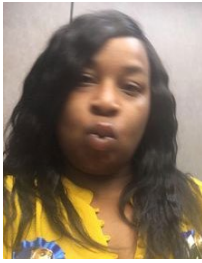
as part of the Odyssey Program, I gained a lot of confidence within myself. When I couldn't get things done on time, I was feeling discouraged. The support I received, the encouraging words, and the push make it almost 100 percent better. I'm able to gain back my focus to succeed and get things done.

I can express myself more with words and not fear to be judged. I'm gaining so much help with grammar, vocabulary, and writing. I feel confident in what I am writing now. This first semester has brought back so many things

I learned in the past. It's a great refresher because I've forgotten a lot of things I was taught.

Knowing the support this program has, I absolutely know the second semester will be a bit easier for me. I look forward to gaining even more confidence in my writing and having a bigger voice. I also would like to interact more with my classmates and all the people who are helping us all out. They are a group of great people, and they have great debates and laughs even though we are all on Zoom.

(Cashae Davis)



I should continue into the second semester because I want to finish what I started. If this was not during COVID, I know I wouldn't be behind. I know myself; that's why I

never take online classes. Sitting in a classroom is different and better. I know I can do this; I need more one on one time. I'm finally settled with reliable childcare. It took until the end of this semester, but I have stable housing. My health has been better since we moved, so I know second semester is going to be better and easier. I'm learning things I didn't know about that I'm still trying to understand. I don't want to drop out because I can't come into a real classroom. I'm trying to push myself. It's a thing I'm not understanding, but I want to, I really do. I always finish what I start. **(Paris Foster)**



We all change in a matter of months. I guess it's what we invest in that makes a difference. When we first started, I was beyond shy. I think I've gotten a little better at that. Online classes are very new to me and difficult. But with each conversation and new book, I

seem to be building a new muscle.

At the same time, my children and I have something in common: home schooling, LOL.

But the biggest change is the conversations and the look in my kids' eyes as we talk about schooling and their future. Through Odyssey, I can spark the imagination through conversation about what I am doing. I sense something different in them: hope. Through books, school, writing, and history, Odyssey has given my family the imagination it needed.

(Fernando Galindo)

"Odyssey has given my family the imagination it needed."



I am halfway through Odyssey 2020-21. I have met all my classmates via the internet and read their stories via the Oracle, hand-delivered...DIFFERENT! This class is full of marvelous, motivating, and inspirational people.

There have been ups and downs on and off the screen, but for the most part all of us have shown up and given our BEST—and during a PANDEMIC! Each person of Odyssey 2020-21 has shown and has embodied resilience, persistence, and dedication to THEMSELVES! I am grateful, and I would not change a second of 2020.

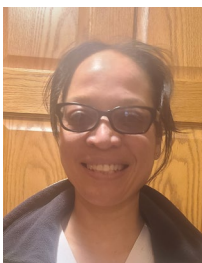
This pandemic has pushed and pulled me for sure, but a diamond is created under an immense amount of pressure. This class is full of heroes and sheroes! This experience has sharpened my abilities as an individual for sure. Character building should definitely be a part of the next class structure. I am excited for the next semester. I am a mother of four children. I am a Transit Operator for the City of Madison. To say the least, "I AM ME! And that's all I can be"-Willow Smith **(Sarah Galinski)**



I want to start off by thanking all the UW Odyssey professors, tutors, and volunteers for giving their time and encouragement weekly. I am 24 years old and a mother of a three-year-old girl. As a young mom and full-time employee, it's hard to find time and money for education; we all know education is important, but what can you do when you have another life depending on you?

Odyssey only being one day a week and flexible with small groups has made it really easy to squeeze into my busy schedule. Odyssey has been my escape from reality; it's where I get to have an hour to myself and not feel guilty. Not only do I have an escape to do something that will benefit me, but my classmates have made me more confident in myself.

Writing has never been my favorite, and I used to be terrified of other people reading anything that was not in texting style. Due to the Oracles that are printed monthly, I have gotten used to having others read what I write . . . which gave me anxiety at first, but after some good feedback from my classmates, that anxiety has been decreasing. At the same time, I've been getting more confidence about my work. I have contributed by bringing leadership during small group sessions. I have showed that by volunteering and using time wisely. **(Erika Gonzalez)**



I am a very quick learner and love to learn new things. The Odyssey Project has shown me so many different aspects of life and how to handle situations. I have been able to relate to many of my classmates because of their story, and I also was able to meet and hear the stories of guests as well. I'm sure someone can relate to my stories and situations that I have shared.

I believe I have yet soooo much more to learn in the second semester of Odyssey. There are yet more hidden figures to discover and look up to. Professor Emily, I thank you soooo much again for giving me this opportunity to further my education

by continuing with the second semester of Odyssey. **(Valeria Gordon)**



When I applied for Odyssey, I knew this was a great opportunity. After completing a full semester, I know now that Odyssey is really a great opportunity. I have gotten more organized, and I did a good job getting all assignments done regardless of the barriers that I had. I decided to better myself, and that's what I'm going to continue to do. I hate Zoom, and I do better in a class setting. I have not been showing my face a lot and will work on it more second semester. **(Bresha Green)**



My name is Melissa, and I started my Odyssey in the fall of 2019. Now, finishing Odyssey is my beacon of hope for the next chapter in my life. During my first semester, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. My job was spreading me thinner than hot oil, my children were struggling with school, and my mother was having complications with her health, so yeah everything. Things that brought me joy became a chore and an obstacle. Having to let this class go was one of the hardest decisions I've had to make in a long time. Sometimes making the right decision can be the hardest thing to do.

Lucky for me, Emily is totally awesome and allowed me to come back. We often don't get a second chance and yet this is mine. It's exciting to wonder who my classmates will be and the energy of the cohort. Faith, optimism, and hope operate in our lives pretty well when we find how to make it work for ourselves, but when others give you a chance and believe in you, it magnifies and propels us into our greatness.

This time around Odyssey will have undivided attention and focus. I've been more ready to leave the past behind and walk down the hallway toward my future. I can't wait to look back on the memory of finishing this class and how it set me on the path to what I have yet to achieve. **(Melissa Herriges)**

"Finishing Odyssey is my beacon of hope for the next chapter in my life."



In this first semester of Odyssey, I feel like I have learned a lot. At first, I was nervous—extremely nervous. In fact, I didn't know if I was the right type of person for the class. I had no confidence in my writing nor in my reading aloud skills. I realized quickly that those fears would have to be put on hold for me to succeed in this program.

I feel like a bird that was able to spread its wings and take flight; sure, I'm not soaring to my highest potential yet, but that's why I need to stay in this class. I know with the help of EVERYONE in Odyssey that I can achieve great heights.

"No question is a dumb question!" I honestly can say I feel like I'm a good example of that quote. No, I am not calling myself dumb. I am saying that even if I am not sure about the answer to a question, feeling like I'm the only person who can't understand, I still will unmute myself and ask my question, not just for my benefit, but for those who are having even more trouble than me. It can give them the courage to speak up. I feel like I bring a lot to Odyssey—maybe a laugh, help with homework in discussions, or just trying to keep the peace. I feel like I do my best to make my presence one that can impact others. **(Kwan Hogan)**



I'd like to be able to become a better writer. I was dormant for a long time; thanks to Odyssey, that dormant state of mind has gone away as long as I'm active in the program. I believe continuing in the Odyssey Program, building my knowledge, and working with my classmates of different backgrounds and great, amazing teachings, I will figure out what I want to study. I'll pursue my education in that field in

"I feel like a bird that was able to spread its wings and take flight."

the long run when I finally figure out what I want to study.

So far, I have tried to be active in participating in class and interacting with my classmates in the chat room. I wish I could participate more within a different scope in our class. I wish I could participate in other various topics on Canvas, academic and non-academic, and share my cooking, for example. I also wish I was more consistent in turning in homework on time. It has been a hard time at work for me because I have been dealing with a lot of stress. Sometimes I don't have time to do homework, and sometimes my stress levels are so high that I forget I have homework due. Sometimes I turn it in on time and the system doesn't cooperate. It has been a hard year; however, I do want to continue in the program, and I will do my best and be a better student this coming semester. **(Henry Irisson)**



What I got out of Odyssey this past semester was how to stay resilient because things were really tough for me but I kept pushing through. On top of everything, I got COVID during Thanksgiving, but I was able to survive it.

Learning about William Blake and who he was I enjoyed very much. Among other things that I did not know about historically, I learned more about slavery. Why do I want to continue into the next semester? I'm not done learning yet.



I do hope that this semester goes a little smoother for me and that I can stay caught up on homework assignments. I also learned how people I've never even met in my life are willing to show up for me and help me when I'm in such a hard time. I have gratitude for that and for the people that run this program for being there for me. It would have been nice if we could have all met each other in person. Hopefully one day we still can. **(Jessica Jacobs)**



Coming to the Odyssey Program, I didn't know what to expect. Now, actually being in the class has opened my mind back up. I felt lost. I always wanted to write movies, books, and T.V. series, but I didn't really feel that smart.

Life had me down, and my curiosity and fantasy and dreams were just stuck in my head with no outlet. Odyssey gave me that great feeling again. I'm smiling as I write this because I have received so much love and support even though I didn't live up to my end of the bargain. That's usually not me. I try my best in everything I do, but while in the program, life got me down.

The things I've been learning so far and seeing my own writing published in the Oracles have given me a newfound freedom. I'm not ready to stop feeding my mind new things. I'm interested in everything we discuss, and I'm excited to see what new literature we will learn in the second semester. I've started back writing and eventually might want to share it, and Odyssey is a perfect group to do it with. Another big thing I love is hearing about the lives and experiences of my classmates, their perspectives on things as well as the staff. It's interesting. I'm definitely going to further my education based off this class and re-learning what I'm made of and could be. I told you guys through it all I would find a way to be here every day and stay on board. I'm here. I'm determined. I'm motivated. I'm ready to see what else Odyssey has in store for me. **(Brianna Johnson)**



ODYSSEY is a long, eventful, adventurous journey. Odyssey has given me more experiences to express myself. I am less shy and more willing to try. I have learned to take further steps in my career. I have learned to take criticism without overthinking it. I have

shown my kids that even adults learn, that it's okay to need help to get to where you want to go, and to be more patient. I used to think that going back to school would take forever, but I also learned that

*"Being in this class,
I'm learning to be great."*

time is valuable
and to never let
the struggles
that you face

stop you from conquering your goals. I've begun to lead my kids, who also struggle with school work. I would pick up my pen, and they would pick up their pencils and begin to write. A month ago, they couldn't do that. I told them even I struggled more than my younger sisters on the woman of courage papers, but I realized in order to have courage you have to be brave enough to not be ashamed to let people help you to fix the problems you may not want to fix.

Being in this class, I'm learning to be great. I have the opportunity to continue with Odyssey to share work and opinions with classmates and to be able to work on my writing only to become better. I know I've got a long way to go, but having the support from a class like this, I know I will get there. This will be a good opportunity with love and support from fellow classmates to be able to continue with this class to accomplish my goals years after.

I'm glad to have to honor to be doing this with the Class of 2021. Time can also take a pause, but joining this class I got to press play. It can be late for some, but only time will tell, so I'm learning to not waste time because every second of every minute passes you by every day so you can learn something new. I'm happy to be a part of Odyssey and can't wait to see what's next. **(Yvonne Johnson)**





Hello again. I have enjoyed this semester of getting back in the swing of things with school. It is nice to get a taste of learning again. So far, I have learned to be more patient and open for more help still; there is no way to ever be a master at something. To be a master is to also be the most ignorant because no one can truly master anything. There is always more to learn, and I am wanting to learn more. I am outgoing yet closed off, so being online is forcing me to interact in ways I am usually uncomfortable with. I can easily articulate what I am saying in person (mostly). Through a computer screen it's another thing, and writing itself is another thing. I am so rusty and want to continue with Odyssey to get the help and guidance that I need to be able to articulate as well in these other forms of communication.

It is so important nowadays to be able to be understood by the ones you truly want to understand you. I see how it is so much easier to get words confused when in written form, without a larger knowledge of language and punctuation to help clarify. I have contributed myself to this program by being completely in it. I bring an energy and different perspective to our virtual classroom that is unique and pleasant. I am hoping to share some mindfulness practices or some basic restorative yoga with our classroom someday once I feel comfortable. I cannot wait for it to get more challenging, more interactive, and for people to finally start loosening up, including myself. Thanks for this opportunity. **(Feather Lloyd)**



Here I am. It's 8:32 in the morning and I can't sleep from jet lag. I'm "home" but it's not the same home I left. I'm 34, an immigrant in America, and now a stranger here in Ireland. When I sleep in my little single bed, I feel like a boy trapped in the body of a man. Everyone I

know in this town has gone, some not too far, but far enough all the same.

It's odd, I've only just passed the second spirit in *A Christmas Carol* but this morning, unable to sleep, I went out walking. I went by two houses I grew up in. One has been bulldozed so that someone can

build a holiday home they'll never visit. The other, a tiny cottage sandwiched between a thick forest and a grey beach, has been allowed to fall into ruin. I'm not sure yet what these strange synchronicities with Scrooge mean.

I've struggled to make sense of my adopted country, torn between the security of an old identity and the uncertainty of a new one. And I've struggled even to establish any sense of ontological security in my life. Ontological security means the comforting belief that one's time on earth has a meaningful progression and that events follow events in a logical, comprehensible manner, like steps rising up to the summit of a great mountain. There've been times in the past year I felt as though I'd stumbled into a psychological desert, my mind barren of all worthwhile thought, like some wind-haunted Soviet field in a nightmare.

*"Onwards to Ithaca we go!
We have to; it's life or death."*

But thanks to Odyssey, the soil on that field has been turned over, and now all sorts of interesting things are beginning to take root.

Odyssey has shown me history free from whitewashing, and great art that relies on its primacy and honesty to create empathy. It's also led me into a period of productive self-examination. It's not easy for me to say what I've contributed beyond a funny voice and some bad jokes, but I know what I've received from my peers and hope I can give back even half as much.

An example: Plato's Cave. When we discussed this work in class, we heard stories of addiction, poverty, abuse, religious indoctrination, and brainwashing by mass media. I understood these stories; they were my stories too. But these weren't the rote explorations of a suburban kid going through the motions of an education. My classmates forcefully illustrated that the cave wasn't some dusty, out of date concept for academics to ponder. It was alive, modern, and essential. For many of us, escaping the cave could quite literally be life or death. That's wisdom hard won, which I will never forget.

Why do I want to continue with Odyssey? I want to continue because the journey is so far from over. I hope no one now on this ship will stop here. Onwards to Ithaca we go! We have to; it's life or death. **(Farren McDonald)**



My first day of class I

“In Odyssey I feel safe to tell my story.”

I would love to get a bachelor's

was nervous; I had no idea what to expect. I heard many good things about Odyssey from my friend Ron, so I was also excited. I have really grown as a person during Odyssey. I try to be active in conversation in

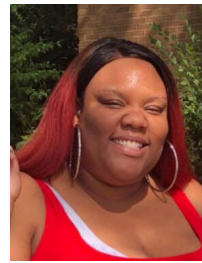
every class. I push myself to go out of my comfort zone by volunteering to read. That is hard for me because I have always been the person to encourage people to do great things. Now that I am in Odyssey, I am the one doing the great things.

I work a full-time job during the day and volunteer as a Commissioner for Affirmative Action, Chair of a subcommittee of Affirmative Action, Chair of the Community Impact Advisor's Council, and serve on The Law Enforcement Leaders of Color Calibration. I thought about reducing the sum of my volunteer work so that I would not be so busy. Then I realized my whole life I juggled a lot of things like working two jobs and raising kids, so I was going to work through this. My volunteer work and the Odyssey Program are all things I love, and that is why I refuse to give any of them up.

I put my whole heart in every paper I write. I am not going to lie; it is hard for me to share my life experiences in public, but in Odyssey I feel safe to tell my story. I read my classmates' stories, and their honesty helps me feel comfortable to tell my story. I have learned that my story is nothing to be ashamed of. Every reading assignment takes me into a different world, some dark, sad, and hopeless. Then some give you courage and strength. I work hard to make sure I turn in every assignment on time. I promised myself if I got in this class, I would give 110%. Odyssey is my way to a better life. My grandma always told me the only thing you can take with you when you die is your education. I never realized how right she was until recently. I am tired of working hard and barely having enough money to pay my bills. Odyssey is my way to a better life, a better job, and a better me.

It is very important for me to finish next semester with a bang! I remember promising Emily and Kevin in my interview that if I were chosen, I would finish. I intend to keep that promise. I plan on working just as hard if not harder next semester. Completing Odyssey is a start for me to continue my education.

degree either in social work or criminal justice. Odyssey will give me the tools I need to succeed in life. Now is the time for me to focus on my dreams, and getting a college education is one dream I plan on making come true. Odyssey is a journey I need to complete so I can overcome fears and make a better life for myself. **(Michelle McKoy)**



The Odyssey Program has changed the trajectory of my life for the better. This class has allowed me to lay a solid foundation for my future studies through the introduction and exploration of general education studies that have broadened my knowledge base. As an American who grew up in a developing country, I have witnessed the struggles of those who lack education and the opportunity for success. I know the hardships and obstacles that one endures in the face of poverty. As such, I am driven to take a different path and take advantage of the opportunity that this class affords me. Completing this class will allow me to further my education and make a better life for myself and my children.

As a student in this class, I have contributed to my peers' knowledge of life outside America by sharing my personal experiences with my instructors and classmates. I have shared my life and have introduced them to a reality of developed countries and cultures that is neglected by the media because it does not fit the mainstream media narrative. I have presented a different perspective of life that shows those living in developing countries as humans who share the same values and aspirations, such as education and success, as others and not victims of their circumstances and poverty.

This semester I have learned I desire to be a part of Odyssey for a second semester because I want to take my education to the next level. This class has rekindled my desire for learning, and completing this class will prove my commitment to my education and success. Next semester, I will continue to grow and develop academically through determination and dedication to my Odyssey course. Upon graduation, I will pursue my RN degree and mentor others who want to succeed despite the obstacles they have endured. **(Stephaney Obi)**



I would like to continue to be a part of Odyssey because I see growth in myself. Since starting this class I have been able to commit to something that is not as easy as I thought it would be. I am very proud of my writing. Every time I read through the

Oracles and see my thoughts, I feel important and accomplished. I want to remain in this course because I know I can push myself even harder to be even better with help from the Odyssey Program. I think I bring a unique perspective and a bit of humor to the table, which we could all use at a time like this. **(Asia Pearson)**

"I'm proud of me."



September 2020, my life changed drastically, I started a program I knew nothing about, let alone know many people in it. Since then, I actually feel like I have a functional school family. I thought of it as, "let me get my feet wet again."

I get very overwhelmed quickly with things, so this year I found an approach to look at things a different way. I've allowed myself to grow, give myself space to understand and reflect. This has given me strength to keep pushing and allow change to occur.

I feel I bring nice energy to this program. Every breakout room I'm in I love to keep people smiling and on topic. I will bring that same smile into 2021, hoping to keep the smiles coming. I've pretty much been soaking up information from the start, but what I have found most interesting are the exercises we perform (allows us to be silly/open but also learning points involved). I'd like to be a part of second semester because the learning never stops and our family still has time together. I left the first semester wanting more help with my writing and sentence structuring. **(Burnett Reed)**



When I first started the Odyssey Program, I thought I knew it all about American history. But what I found out was that I didn't know enough. As we are all going through a stressful but historic time, this program is very motivating for me. I was excited

to become a part of the program but nervous not knowing what to expect. Me being a mother of four African American boys, one being a newborn and the others starting home school, is hard to juggle. I appreciate the encouraging words received from staff, visitors, and other members

of the alumni; that really did a lot for me. I have a more positive outlook on things since back in September, and it all contributes to the better me. I'm proud of me. I was able to do the impossible: reading and writing all those papers and finishing first semester in a good place. I'm still excited but not nervous anymore, just anxious now. I am looking forward to seeing what's next. **(Delisha Smith)**





This semester hasn't been the easiest. I found myself more easily depressed and distracted than usual. I can say having something to look forward to during the week did bring some enjoyment into my days. Class was always fun, entertaining, and full of love.

So far in Odyssey, I've discovered my learning techniques, my weaknesses and strengths. Also, I've gotten the chance to be a part of a group that really cares if you make it or not. Overall, the Odyssey Program has been really helpful during this challenging time period. I look forward to this next semester. I have tons of new goals and focuses. (**Krystal Smith**)



I believe that I deserve to continue with the Odyssey program for many reasons. When I first started with the program, I was in the middle of completing my associates with Madison College, which was very stressful and time consuming. I could not give

Odyssey my best because of the commitments that I made to myself to endure the stress of juggling M.A.T.C and Odyssey so I may at some point enjoy my Odyssey. The second semester will be even better; my ability to stay focused and get work in on time will be much easier. I can truly enjoy the connections even through the Zooms with other students and tutors.

What I have taken away from the first semester while in Odyssey was the ability to start my journey as a writer. I feel understood when I can express myself through words and learning how to communicate to those who may not understand me. I feel supported in ways that I never thought that I could be, when faced with a problem whether it is related to school or not staff always have a solution or can at least

*"Through rain, sleet, snow,
or with a brand new baby in
tow, with Odyssey I know I
will reach my goal."*

point me in the right direction. To this I am thankful and will love to continue to experience the journey with Odyssey. (**Theadora Smith**)



I'm excited to say that I'm willing to change to learn and be strong for myself and my family. I look forward to being an accomplisher, creator of life, and pioneer to knowledge. "Hey, I'm almost there." I want to be better at writing and to write folktales and stories so compelling that people can't wait to read them. I'm challenging myself to succeed at the quest we all call an Odyssey. (**Dana Stokes**)



A comfort zone has become an unfamiliar concept for me since I've become a part of Odyssey. Each class has contained a moment in which I've had to come out of my shell. Being challenged in that way has grown my confidence immensely, especially in my writing abilities. At the end of each class, I always left with a feeling of accomplishment, even when I thought I didn't accomplish enough. When given the opportunity to share my thoughts, the genuine attentiveness and feedback reassured me that my voice mattered. It made me feel as though I had something to contribute. My unique perspective, creativity, and sense of humor are just some of the things I've had the opportunity of sharing with my peers.

I would love to continue to be a part of this awesome voyage with Odyssey. There have been an enormous number of positive changes in my life since I started participating in this class. My children have witnessed me start many, many things in my life, but they rarely get to see me finish them. I am going to finish this time—strong! Through rain, sleet, snow, or with a brand-new baby in tow, with Odyssey I know I will reach my goal! (**Faleshuh Walker**)



Not only am I learning, but I also feel that I have a community. I've begun to write better, and I am even more engaged with reading. When I first started, I made a comment stating that I wasn't a writer. The Odyssey program has proven me wrong. I look forward

to logging into class. It has also helped me to multitask. This Odyssey Program gives me hope, especially during the pandemic! **(Sunni Walker)**



I am an honest, quiet, shy, and giving person. What I have experienced with the Odyssey Project is exactly what I needed to really get a handle on learning the way that fits well for me. I enjoy the community support of the program. I enjoy the helpfulness

and friendliness of the instructors. I learned how to express myself in writing and the value of working together as a team.

I like the mission of what the Odyssey program stands for—helping others succeed in life. That mission is something I feel very close to in my heart. I would like to be part of the success and continuation of this program. I would like to continue learning and succeeding in my life. I am interested in administrative social work. I would like to be a helping hand to people in need, whether it's help finding the right programs or writing proposals for better funding in the communities.

In Odyssey I am getting personable help with the course lessons and homework. It is a very empowering feeling to be a part of this wonderful program. I look forward to a brighter future due to the personable care and teachings of this program. **(Diane Walton)**

When first attending Odyssey, I thought it wouldn't be as interesting as it is, but it's a fun learning experience. I knew it focused on writing, which is something that I knew I would need to be skilled in to continue in college courses. But Odyssey focuses on much more than writing. Odyssey is a very family-type environment for people like myself.



Continuing into the second semester is not only helping me to build skills but also helping me to be open minded. It has helped me build relationships with great people. I have shared some of my life stories with Odyssey and allowed people to get to know

me. I opened up to not being shy and participating in all the activities, also learning new things about myself. Odyssey is a very nonjudging community that gives you the space to be yourself.

(Keyanna Wilson)



I like to be called Qui. My favorite color is blue. I'm a single, middle-aged mother of one. I'm a Virgo. I enjoy spending time with loved ones. I also love eating, playing games, and going on outings with friends and family.

Since I've been in the program, I've learned that our mentors are very patient and understanding in such a critical time. I like the fact that you guys have different resources to help if needed. I love the no-right-or-wrong concept you came up with, and it helps us to understand things that we don't. The energy that you all give off is very positive and genuine.

I don't feel I've contributed much to the class aside from reading here and there because of personal reasons, but I can say that I'm very thankful for the help that I've received since I've been a part of the program. I'm looking forward to contributing more next semester.

I want to continue class because I actually appreciate being given the opportunity for my child and myself to have joined the rest of the class that will be part of history like the others. It gives me hope and reminds me that I'm achieving something I've been prolonging. Everyone that started out seemed scared or nervous and is now more content. I love the interaction with peers. I know I missed some classes, but I am looking forward to being at most classes next semester and doing better. **(Shiquita Woods)**

RESOLUTIONS FOR 2021



life because life is short. I can't be this anti-social my whole life, knowing I have a ton of people who depend/need me. I also want to start cooking more and learning new recipes. Overall, I just want to evolve and be a better, more organized, healthier person. **(Tawania Alston)**

For 2021 I have promised to break this prison I have kept myself in—not allowing myself to jump for fear of falling, and to that effect I have been getting in my own way. I have never moved with fear, and I believe that's why I have been able to succeed at most endeavors. Presently I feel trapped in the same position. Complacency will be the death of me if I don't choose to challenge myself and my life. **(Calvin Balentine)**

My goal in 2021 is to become a better me. I have always struggled with self-esteem and always put myself last. So, in 2021 I am deciding to change that and to become a better me. I want to keep growing as a person, mother, and friend, and I just want to keep growing all around. **(Betsy Alfaro)**

For 2021, I have many resolutions I hope I can achieve. I think a lot of things in my life need to change. I'm not a "new year, new me" person, but 2020 has weighed me down. This year was filled with sickness, death, oppression, and the regular obstacles life has thrown at me, and I just I think I need a change.

I'd like to lose weight for sure; this is my biggest goal. I'd like to drink water more since I don't like it at all. I'd like to have a schedule to keep me more productive and involved with other people in my





Every year I tell myself I really have to stop making resolutions at the beginning of the year that I can't keep. But hey, a new year can give us the desire and the motivation to follow a new path. My main resolutions for the year 2021 are as follows:

- Do not put off until tomorrow what I can do immediately. Every year I say the same thing.
- I have to redo my resume and look for a better job. I absolutely have to change my job in 2021.
- Resume my studies in architecture, integrating into the UW.
- Spend more time with my family.
- I would like to try a new (artistic) activity.
- Take one of my dream trips (I want to visit Hollywood in 2021).
- Learn to say no. One of the problems with overworked people is managing priorities on the one hand, and not being able to say NO when you are asked to do something for others.
- Don't get angry about something trivial anymore; I need to stop stressing myself.
- I absolutely have to stop living in the past. Stop grudges and regrets.
- Give compliments more often and stop always seeing the glass half empty ... in short, take life on the safe side and smile more. **(Souad Bidar)**



My resolutions for 2021 are for my son and me to eat healthier and for both of us to be more physically active. I want to play with my son and get out more. I want to be able to save more money than in 2020. I want to turn my assignments in on time for this class. **(Anjelica Brown)**

For 2021, my resolutions are: BREATHE! Listen MORE...without listening to answer but with an open heart and mind to receive. Make mindful choices, considering everyone and not just how my choice would benefit myself. **(Sarah Galinski)**



One resolution I have is to get better at handling my emotions and anxiety. **(Erika Gonzalez)**

I always love to learn new things and want to be a better person and advocate in the future for people in need. My first resolution for 2021 is to find two mentors to help me grow. My second promise to myself is to make a business plan for a respite center for children with disabilities. Me having two children with autism and little help has really given me the courage to at least try to open a second respite center in Madison. My third decision is to start paying off my debt and help others work on their credit. My fourth commitment is to write a book about my life. My last plan is to start saving for the house I will buy 2022. **(Bresha Green)**

One resolution that I have, that I feel is kind of broad, is to not fall into temptations. I say this is broad because it covers so many things. But for me these temptations are relationships, specifically toxic ones, spending money faster than saving it, and failing to at least try to make my music dreams a reality. For obvious reasons, I feel like the better control I get over these, the better chance I have at making 2021 a more promising year for me. **(Kwan Hogan)**

I am hoping to get into the New Year with a few resolutions in mind. First, I have a passion for bicycles, and I have not been able to ride them in the last few years. I will try so, so hard to get into the cycling world again by doing a 10-20 mile ride every week, nothing crazy like I used to.

Two: I'm thinking of looking into programs



to finally get my bachelor's degree. One of the many reasons why I have not been able to get it is because I'm not really sure what I want to do in life. And I'm 39 years old. I guess I have never known what I'm good at and what I enjoy without getting bored after a while. I do like bicycles a lot; maybe I could start my own business in that market. But, again, I get bored and I quit. **(Henry Irisson)**

Main resolution for this year is to have none. Goals and life changes are permanent, and these resolutions have to be made yearly. I want to be clear to myself that these are permanent life changes. My short-term goal is to get my degree in whatever suits me. I have a jumble of credits that need to be evaluated and targeted towards my degree. I would like to have less fear of the unknown. I would like to use my wisdom in a way to help myself, my family, and then others. I want to be strong in my convictions and no longer feel guilty for doing what is best for myself and the ones I love. **(Feather Lloyd)**



It seems unwise to tempt fate or hope too much by making any grand resolutions at this juncture. In January 2020 I was sitting in a restaurant in Chicago with my dad and my sister, who'd come out to visit me. It was a very happy occasion, and I remember clearly thinking, "This will be my year."

The universe laughs at our plans. But every cloud has a silver lining.

I lost my job, but I hated my job. Plus, in a year of dreadful uncertainty I was accepted into Odyssey, and that more than anything has been a light pointing the way out of the morass.

Recently during a depressive, dark patch, Brian and Emily reached out to me. I find the idea of suffering in front of someone excruciatingly embarrassing, but I realized I've been down this road before far too many times and have always been too stubborn and afraid to ever seek help.

So, this year I'm resolved to seeking guidance wherever I can find it and to no longer allow pride to hinder progress. I'm pretty sure I mean it too.
(Farren McDonald)



2020 was a hard year, not just for me but for people nationwide. My resolution for 2021 is to start taking care of my health better. I want to understand more life lessons. Pertaining to health, I want to understand it better for me, my mom, my soon-to-be wife, and my kid. I also want to become more knowledgeable. I want to push myself to learn things I have never known. Pushing myself has also been a challenge, so that's a part of my resolution because that's where it starts. I want to believe I'm a good person and want more for myself instead of just settling. **(Burnett Reed)**

I want to work on not being stressed about bills and to just take baby steps! Also, I want to work toward being a home owner! **(Dana Stokes)**

In 2021 I want to be more understanding. Also, I want to focus more on myself and do things for me. I'm always helping others, but now I need to selfcare. **(Sunni Walker)**

I've decided to buy myself a planner to keep up with things I've done and need to do in a timely manner. I will be working on healthier eating and drinking intake for better health results. Exercising is another thing I want to do regularly, maybe twice a week, and having my daughter do it with me. She's usually excited when I ask her, and that motivates me even more. And last but not least, I want to stop smoking cigs which are a very bad habit for me. It's not healthy, and my child hates the smell and is worried about me when I smoke them. Each year I just want to do a little better, even if it's not much. Progressing slowly surely does something for me!
(Shiquita Woods)



SECOND CHANCE FOR EBENEZER SCROOGE



At the beginning of the book Scrooge was a very bitter man who was lonely and grumpy. After three spirits visit him, he sees his past, present, and future life. When being reminded of the love he had as his younger self and feeling that joy when revisiting his past self, Scrooge starts to realize certain things he no longer appreciates or has. He is filled with regret and feelings of not being there for his loved ones. He knows that if he dies, he will also live on just as Jacob Marley, attached to chains and the bindings of his money keeping him from living a life that matters outside of materials. This overpowers Scrooge with the feeling of love and caring for others, knowing he can share and help the ones around him be happy. He changed into a man who wants to love again, a man who wants to right wrongs, be with family, and help those less fortunate because life is too short to have regrets.

(Sarina Benford)

Scrooge changed at the end because he saw what his life was like—empty and lonely. He didn't want that life for himself anymore. I feel the same way every time I wake up from a seizure. That's why I have been pushing myself more, moving my goals' deadline up. Time waits for no one; it's now or

never. I just get so depressed afterwards and finally snap back and remember what I'm doing and who I'm doing it for. It's about Londyn, but it's also about me. That's another one of my resolutions: putting myself first as well as Londyn and continuing to finish what I start, no matter how hard it or life gets.

(Paris Foster)

Scrooge realized what life would be after his death if he stayed mean and bitter towards people. Looking at his past and realizing the pain he was holding onto opened his eyes. Going into his present

showed him the consequences of those actions and how it affected the people around him. I felt like knowing what he did wrong gave him a newfound purpose in life which he didn't have before. Scrooge knew changing his life would help him and drastically change others.

(Brianna Johnson)

Scrooge took a look at his past, present, and future, and he did not like what he saw. He did not like the person he had become. He knew he would have to change by thinking about his childhood once more. There once was fun but hurt as well. He realized people less fortunate do not deserve less because of it.

How is he a different man? He realized he did not want to die an evil man. He did not want to look to the future but knew he must. He did not want Tiny Tim to die, and he did not want to die evil. Scrooge realizes his money could have helped many. He wanted to make amends, as he realized there was still time. He was as happy as an angel, full of joy and change and with Christmas joy. Not knowing at first what day it was, he then realized he did not miss Christmas and could make fun and holiday joy. He learns to give to others. **(Yvonne Johnson)**



him being such a miser and a selfish person, he hated anything about Christmas because of that. But luckily, towards the end of the story, he became more generous after he experienced flashbacks of how cruel and hard he was to people because of greed and how he had not been charitable. He decides to willingly change so that he doesn't end up the way the ghost had foreseen or forewarned him about. **(Stephaney Obi)**

Scrooge is changed by the end of the story as he is no longer an angry bitter man. He begins to display kindness and empathy. After being visited by the spirit of Christmas past, he can clearly see what is most important.

(Asia Pearson)

When Scrooge wakes up, he realizes how he has wasted his life away by being a mean and selfish person. He leaves his home happy and wishing people Merry Christmas on his way to his nephew's home. Once he is there, he mends his relationship with his nephew. Scrooge also anonymously sends his employee Bob Cratchit a turkey for Christmas dinner. Then he gives him a raise so Bob could save enough money to help Tiny Tim not have an early death. Scrooge also makes a huge donation to the poor. I feel in my heart that he lived the rest of his life as a kinder, gentler man. **(Michelle McKoy)**

At the beginning of the story, Scrooge was a very selfish, greedy, unhappy miser who had no sense of Christmas or the Christmas spirit in him. To me, he felt like Christmas was a way for the needy to ask and expect something in the name of Christmas. I also felt that he despised Christmas because it was a holiday for giving. With

The bitter and orneriness was gone and was replaced by joy and happiness. He showed kindness, graciousness, and love to his family and others. He is a man now full of great spirit.

(Diane Walton)



AMANDA GORMAN, "THE HILL WE CLIMB"

READ AT THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION JANUARY 20, 2021

When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade

We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice

And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished

We the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one

And yes we are far from polished
far from pristine
but that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect
We are striving to forge a union with purpose

To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and
conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside

We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious
Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division





Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promise to glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it

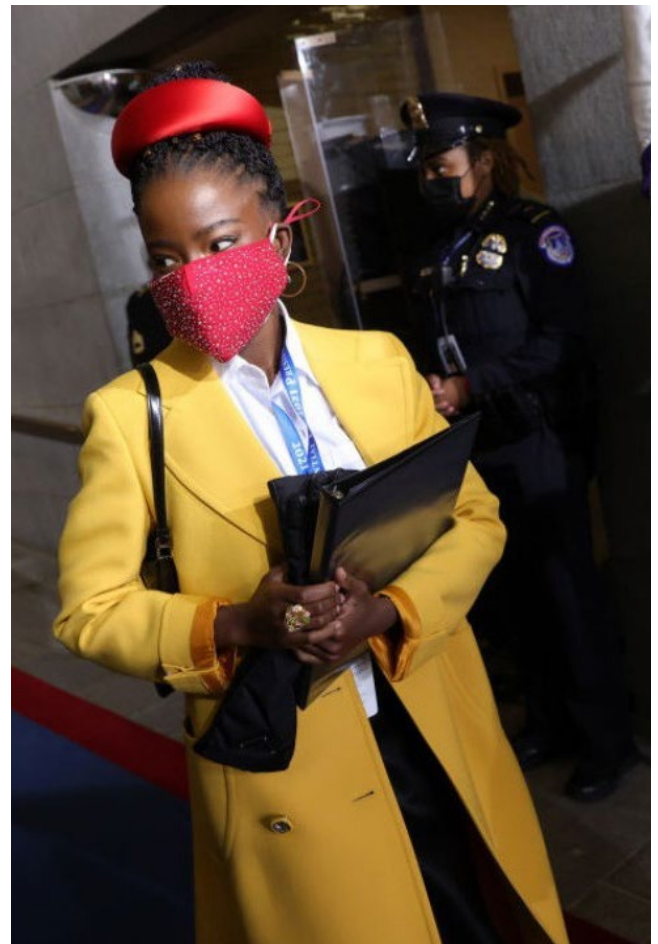
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy
And this effort very nearly succeeded
But while democracy can be periodically delayed
it can never be permanently defeated

In this truth
in this faith we trust
For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us

This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves

So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free
We will not be turned around
or interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next generation
Our blunders become their burdens
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might,
and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy
and change our children's birthright



So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,
we will rise from the windswept northeast
where our forefathers first realized revolution
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,
we will rise from the sunbaked south

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful

When day comes we step out of the shade,
afame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it

