

Odyssey Oracle

Year 9 #10 January 18, 2012



Making a Case for Semester Two

Phyllis Anderson

I am extremely grateful to have been selected from a group of so many. This has been an amazing journey. I have been given the opportunity of a lifetime, with a chance to further my education.

I have learned a great many things from American History, Art, the proper use of punctuation, and my personal favorite: Literature. I have gained great insight from Socrates, the famous philosopher. It had been many years since I read Frederick Douglass or did research to obtain an answer; however, Coach put such a strong desire to fulfill my need to know as many new words as possible and what those big words mean that I am now more determined and driven than ever. Emily has made learning literature easy and is by far the best instructor I have ever had. After each and every visit from Jean Feraca, I find myself questioning and debating everything; my need



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to see things in many different forms has my mind swelling. I have been a resident of Madison for 17 years but had never been to the Chazen Museum, I am ashamed to say. Gene Phillips has me paying close attention to the details of art and looking at building structures in a new way.

As I reflect back over these months of my journey in the Odyssey Project, I feel confident that my spelling has improved. I am also filled with emotion and deep gratitude. My passion and desire to complete my educational term with Odyssey has brought out something that has been dormant for many years. Before Odyssey I had not attended school for 30 years. I became settled and comfortable with my achievements; however, now I have a renewed sense of purpose with vigor, dedication, and determination. I have not felt this empowered in such a long time, and with a grand desire to move forward still even further. I truly believe I can obtain not only my Bachelor's Degree but with hard work and true effort I can have my Master's Degree in Social Work.

I am totally and completely committed to giving my all and my very best when faced with the many challenges ahead. The interpretations of the many poems and different readings my classmates and I have had are astounding. I believe I would be crushed if unable to continue with my pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, I respectfully request the opportunity to complete my journey with the Odyssey Project.

Run Barlow

Close to the start of second semester is a good time to reflect on what we accomplished and evaluate how we are progressing as students. I feel that there is a lot for me to be satisfied with. My reading has improved; I have a better understanding of what I want out of school. I feel I am making the best of my opportunity. I believe that I can be a student at a major university, and I feel the motivation I have for success has spread to the closest people in my life.



Since the day we received our student IDs, I have grasped the concept that we are full students with all of the privileges of any student at the UW. No matter how many classes we have, credits we earn, or hours in the classroom we spend, our education is ongoing and equally valuable. Being a student allows me access to my own study room to focus my thoughts on all my readings. I have been in several study groups, one with a member of the Odyssey Project (Shaquida Johnson), and I find this beneficial for both of us. If you have a hard time finding me in the campus library, then you may want to look for me in one of the local gyms. As a person who believes in self-improvement, I rank physical health high in my priorities. Running, lifting weights, and playing basketball: since becoming a student, I have been in top condition and as healthy as I have ever been. I even plan to make salsa-dancing part of my monthly routine.

This has not been just a physical and mental journey for me. A few weeks ago, I was invited by a friend in the class to attend his church, receive a benediction, and learn a little about our faith in the lord. Although I didn't feel at home with his church, it was the push in the right direction for me to start my relationship with God. On that Sunday, I told myself I would continue to learn about my beliefs and strengthen my relationship with God until I am satisfied and all my questions are answered. (Thank you, Eugene Smalls!)

For as long as I have been in school, this is the longest I have ever gone doing the class assignments and homework. In the past, when I struggle with my reading and my comprehending what's going on in class, I would be quiet. I would find a way to get kicked out or I would stop showing up altogether. I don't want to do that here. The good hearts and charity of my professors and classmates make me want to push myself. I don't want to let them down. I feel I have the tools I needed a long time ago to be able to find success in school. Professor Marshall's Mindbenders and examples of breaking down words to their roots help me every day with my reading and writing. Professor Emily has taught me in a few months what public education could not: grammar and punctuation, when to use a semicolon, whether to use its or it's, how to turn a run-on sentence into a

powerful statement.

These tools I have shared with my family and friends. My mother and I have been studying root words to get ready for the class we plan to take next semester. I was able to explain my 16-year-old cousin's biology homework. We sat down and studied for a course I almost failed when I was her age. I was pleased when she brought home our A on the science test. My workout partner wants to check out some churches and we plan to try a few, go to Sunday school, and maybe find one we can enjoy every Sunday, as long as it starts after 8 AM.

Without Odyssey, I'm not sure what I would have been doing in my free time. Maybe I would be playing video games and wasting time in front of the TV. I would not be enlightening myself with Socrates and Douglass. I'm certain Emma Lazarus would have never entered my mind. My professors gave me many gifts: books, their time, their wisdom, their ears. One thousand thank you's wouldn't be enough. Second semester if I am privileged enough to continue to receive these gifts, I plan to take the teachings that were given to me and give that gift to someone who also needs. I think out of everything they have taught me this year so far, giving may be the best gift you will ever receive. Thank you, Diane, Rene, Jean, Gene, Craig, Coach, and Emily, one thousand times.

Bradley Barner

First and foremost I want to thank Emily and all of Odyssey for not only accepting me and giving me a chance of a lifetime but being there through my hard times and giving me a fighting chance. You don't find so many caring people in a lifetime, so it's all still so surreal to me. I think it's starting to settle into me. It's been a long-fought first semester for me, but one thing you have seen in me is I may bend but I will not be broken. I'm learning that I do have somebody who's willing to listen and be there for me as I bend, which is very relieving, especially for a person like myself who has never really leaned on



anybody due to my independence.

This class has taught me that it's OK to have help. Everybody needs help at one point or another. Help is not a bad thing whatsoever and can take you a long way, but you also have to believe in yourself. That's another big thing I love about Odyssey and our journey: we all believe and are pushing ourselves to success. We have a great support system in our teachers and are thankful for that. As I have been taking this ride of a lifetime class, my teachers and my fellow students have ridden and pushed me further than they know it. There have been a few times when I was at the point of no return. I walked into the class for what I thought would be my last time, but there was something or someone that made me turn that reality switch back on and realize how good I have it right now. It's how you bounce back from life's obstacles that counts. . . .

From this point on I will give 110 percent because I believe in myself and my ability to succeed. I know that I can do better. I have been starting to put my head in the right place and keep it there. . . . I'm here and ready to take care of business no matter how rough and tough times are . . .

You get one life, one shot to make something of yourself, so never settle for the short end of the stick if you don't have to because some people don't get the chance to choose a chance at all. I can say I'm not ready for my ride to end. I'm through the worst and I'm still here fighting. I will fight till the end to better myself. Thanks again to you and all of Odyssey for giving me a chance and being by my side through it all.

Marcia Brown

The first semester of the Odyssey Project was more detailed than I anticipated. I came into this class with an open mind, ready and willing to learn as much as possible. The Odyssey Project has opened my mind to a fresh and endless world of knowledge. I am ready to explore my possibilities for future endeavors.



I love the way Jean Feraca makes Philosophy enjoyable. She makes the characters come to life as we discuss Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and "The Trial and Death of Socrates." I also was thrilled to be able to participate in the reading of *Macbeth* [with Baron Kelly].

Coach is a serious and fun-loving teacher who brings humor to the class every Wednesday night. His teaching is unorthodox, but his message is clear. I need to use my memory in pronouncing and spelling words that are new to me. I use "big" words to communicating with my friends and family, thanks to Coach.

I am not particularly fond of History. History was my least favorite subject in high school. Craig Werner opened my eyes to reflect on the past, present, and future of American History. I respect and appreciate History from a different perspective now because of the teaching technique of Craig Werner.

Emily Auerbach is a powerhouse of a woman. She may be short in stature but is big in personality. I have learned to use writing as a way to express myself by the way Emily structures her homework assignments. . . . When discussing Emily Dickinson, Jane Austen, William Blake, and other poets, Emily Auerbach's face lights up the room with her enthusiasm. Her enthusiasm transfers to the class as we read and write about famous poets.

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the University of Wisconsin for the money spent on making it possible for me to have this opportunity to continue my college education. I am truly grateful for your support. I will make you proud to have

considered me for this rare and wonderful endeavor.

The Odyssey Class of 2012 is full of energetic, serious-minded, and caring individuals. I consider all the students and faculty a part of my family. I love this class as if they are a part of my biological family. I hope the class reciprocates these feelings. I am available to help any class members that need my assistance.

I should be allowed to continue in the Odyssey Project for second semester because I think that I have shown growth in my ability to learn. . . .

Tatenda Bvindi

This Odyssey has introduced me to a world I have always dreamed of but never got an opportunity to pursue. Now that I am part of this wonderful group, I raise up my hands and thank Professor Emily for accepting me into a program that is helping me not only to be out of my cave but to cast my doubts and fears away, molding me to have confidence in my prospects. In helping me, you are reaching out to members of my family at large who look up to me. The Odyssey Project has made it possible for me to meet and interact with new people I may have never met in my lifetime—strong men and women who are radiant, accommodating, and encouraging and are committed to tackle the challenges that may come along this journey as they strive to attain a better and more meaningful future.



I thank the professors and staff members for devoting their time in guiding us in this wagon of knowledge. I greatly value the Wednesday nights that we have met for class so far; they are a powerful agent to my once fainting, parched soul. With Coach bringing a bowl of vocabulary soup each week, I now see a light of hope flickering inside me to shine and never go dim. From the first day of class, I liked how my fellow students greeted me warmly and how each one has been sharing from the heart their life experiences. I fell in love with the Oracle, and it has been a source of inspiration to me. If it weren't for this

class, I would have never gotten a chance to learn American History and to know how determined men and women fought for their freedom. I've been taught Socrates, the great philosopher (Apology, Crito, and Allegory of the Cave), William Blake, Frederick Douglass, and a lot more courageous men and women authors. The Allegory of the Cave has especially made me realize how trapped I was in a dungeon and yet had felt at ease. It has unlocked my mind and opened my eyes to see the caves that are surrounding me. Now that I know, I'm striving to be free.

I used to visit art museums for fun and had never taken serious time to analyze a painting or sculpture. September 21 found us visiting the Chazen Museum of Art with our dear professors guiding us and explaining the importance of paintings that may not have made any sense to me. I greatly appreciated this day because it ignited a desire within me that I shall still nurture and hope to inspire my son as well. After our trip, I visited the Chazen Museum of Art again; this time, I was on a mission to explore at least one painting. "Lady in a Cage" by Sylvia Fein caught my attention, so I decided to write a poem. Instead of just writing about this lady, it was an opportunity for me to express what I thought and also to write about my own experiences in the cage of life. I am privileged to be part of this class that is assisting me to shun and hurl away the doubts and cages that may still hinder success in my quest.

There is a seed I treasure greatly (the opportunity to get higher education) that has been planted within my heart. It has started to take roots, and I understand its impact on my future. If this seed is left at this stage, it will wither and may never be able to bear fruits again. It will be like a wagon going in circles without any destination. I should be allowed to continue on this empowering journey next semester because I do not want to see myself falling back in the dungeons where I've been. I want to see myself grow and to

develop and increase my self-esteem so that I can make a difference to the community and be a role model for my son.

Yolanda Cunningham

Coming into the Odyssey Project I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what to expect from the classes, instructors, nor the students, and most of all myself. I had a vision of what I wanted for my life, but no real direction on how to get there. The Odyssey Project has thus far broadened my view of what I want to do. Becoming a writer has taken on a whole new meaning for me. I realize that I have so much more to learn, as I have learned more than I could have ever imagined already.

I've explored the worlds of William Wordsworth, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, and William Shakespeare (*Macbeth*). These inspiring poets have influenced my consciousness to add depth to my own writing by exploring different types of literature. Through William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," I was able to allow his words to come into myself and perceive things in a different way. I adapted to his style of poetry and was able to respond naturally even though it took me out of my comfort zone. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* gave me a better understanding of how different types of language, the written and the spoken word, come together. Instead of shutting down, I embraced this new

world of creativity, and I am allowing it to take its course.

I discovered the struggles of Socrates and Frederick Douglass. I'm challenged weekly with new words to add to my vocabulary along with unlimited writing assignments. I learned of many adventures through



U.S. History and the importance of government documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. I've experienced the beauty of Art through the Chazen Museum, along with the teachings of Philosophy and Theater. I had a chance to be engulfed in harmonious melodies from a gifted pianist. I even had the honor of meeting Sonia Nazario, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Enrique's Journey* and the author highlighted in the UW's 2011-2012 Go Big Read. I don't believe I could have been given this opportunity anywhere else.

Life is good for me now. I like where my spirit is. Because of the Odyssey Project, I have become more confident with my pen, which is an added bonus of subduing the fear of writing. I have allowed my mind to open up exponentially. My belief is that there is hidden wisdom ahead that I would love to obtain. I believe it would be a positive advantage for me to pursue this odyssey. I would like to learn more in the area of English and its punctuation, for this is a tool I need to possess in order to hone my craft and become the best writer I can be. I would like to learn how to become a more effective reader. I want to be taught leadership.

One thing I would like to add to the class is that everyone is a winner. We are all in this together; if everybody helps each other, then failure will not exist among any of us. Romans 8:37: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." No, I am not the perfect package yet. I am willing to put the work in; I'm committed to take the time necessary to bring myself up to the standard. I'm giving my all to this Odyssey Project, with the belief that nothing but good will follow me. I believe upon completion of this course, my writing abilities will have been elevated phenomenally. Prosperous power is what I will have attained. It is then that I will be able to reach across many barriers in life. I don't know where I'll end up, but what I do know is that when I leave the Odyssey Project, all my gifts, talents, discoveries, and experiences will be affected profoundly and I will have done a great thing: I WILL HAVE FINISHED!

Samantha East

The Odyssey Project is a godsend for me. I see myself going forward to school not being afraid

of it. It has changed my life for the greater good. I'm reading more and just trying to incorporate more into everyday life.

I see it in my home life as well. I was so proud to see my five-year-old getting books and pen and paper. She writes her first and last name and reads it back to me. She can read a book almost to the end without any help from me. My oldest two are getting better grades in school. What I learn in Odyssey, I take home and talk to my children about. It makes me feel great that I'm not sitting around at home doing nothing to better myself.

My son has chosen to go to college after finishing high school. As a mother, I was afraid because of his autism, but I have to take myself out of the cave of fear and let him explore life.

I love the role plays that Ms. Emily puts on. It's like a cloak; on for play and off for work. I love Coach's teaching skills and his love of words. Sometimes I think he used to be a beatnik. Ms. Feraca is great in explaining philosophy. Mr. Werner is a very interesting person for American and Black History. All of the staff is great. I would tell anyone to get off your butt and get into the Odyssey Program. It's not a waste of time but an odyssey of education if you are willing to sail for it.



Lorraine Garrett

91 days ago I never could have imagined that my life would have been impacted the way it has. 2,184 hours ago I didn't even think school was an option for me. I have found out that in 131, 040 minutes previous to this date, I am not only a person who has a lot to share but that I actually know how to display it through words of learning. I thought to myself that if I can experience life being challenged and changed for the better in just 7, 862,400 seconds,



then how much more can I conquer in the next 91 days ahead?

In a previous assignment you asked me if I considered myself to be a writer, and my answer was no. Well, a lot has changed now, and I can honestly say with confidence that yes, I am a writer in the making. If you allow me to continue to the next phase of this journey, you will witness and experience more of the unfolding of my life's ups and downs and how I was able to overcome adversity through a little thing called learning.

A caterpillar crawling through life is what I used to be. A butterfly now taught how to fly free is what has become of me. Please don't stop my growth!

Jesse Hamilton

I believe since I have become a part of the Odyssey Project, my life has more meaning. I wake up every day with Odyssey on my mind before I get out of bed. It has become a part of my daily routine. I talk about this experience with everyone in my life—friends, family, and people I encounter on a daily basis. I definitely have to stay in the Odyssey Project in order to finish what I have started, which is a new way of thinking. I also seek a new life from the hard work and dedication to Odyssey as a new person. I can feel the change in my attitude towards life since being a part of this wonderful odyssey. I can have a purpose to change and become someone important and not the old person I was before I started Odyssey.

This is an excellent and most needed experience for someone like me. I would not have understood as many terms and books or be pursuing finishing school with flying colors if not for Odyssey. I take being in Odyssey very seriously. I can't fail or let my class and most importantly my instructors down. I deserve to be in Odyssey because I have a hunger to feed my brain with all this great knowledge the project offers me. I won't have it any other way.

Yetta Harris

This semester has been a challenge. Most of

my life I have left many challenges just short of completion. I would start strong, have doubts, procrastinate, and then quit.

One memory that I've tried to suppress for almost 30 years is that I graduated from grade school a year early and attended one of the top magnet schools in Chicago at the time. I was in all honors classes and I was getting good grades. Two weeks before the school year was over, I stopped going to class and failed every class. Shame, disappointment, and regret have flooded my life from that experience. What could I have been? This was always in the back of my mind, and it left me stuck for just as many years. I have faced the 13-year-old Yetta who was having panic attacks and doubts, and I have forgiven her. She didn't know any better. I have forgiven the 20-something, 30-something, and now 40-something-year old self. Now I am free. I need the next semester to work that freedom.

Terry Hart

The University of Wisconsin Odyssey Project is a lifelong journey. The people you meet and the professors who teach us are all great people. Ever since I've started the Odyssey Project, I've welcomed the challenge with an open mind and an open heart. The Odyssey Project has given me a chance to rewrite the story of my life.

I came on this journey with a lot of unanswered questions but never any doubt. The program has opened my mind up to all of the wonderful gifts God has given me. I love people, and I love learning. This Odyssey has helped me buckle down and start applying myself to the more important things in my life. It has surely helped me become a better father and mostly a better man. I understand





what it is that I need to do to be successful in life. The Odyssey Program has helped me prioritize my life. I know what's important now, and I feel successful.

I've cherished my time with my classmates and especially my professors. I know mentally and physically I've come up to par. At first I was nervous. I wanted to make sure my heart and mind were in the same place. I've quickly found out they are in unison.

If given a chance to continue on in the UW Odyssey Project, I promise to be great and to continue to apply myself and work much harder. I'm in the driver's seat, and I know where I would like to go. My future smells great. I want to become a much better writer. I also feel it's my duty to make the class loose and able to have a good time, but that I will tone it down. I hope all of my classmates and professors accept and appreciate me because I appreciate all of you. This 2011-2012 Odyssey group is special. We all bring different

traits and talents to the table.

I have unfinished business on this journey. To stop my Odyssey and get off the ship now is not an option. I have a lot left to learn and much more to offer. Please let me continue this Odyssey because my best is yet to come.

Keith Johnson

Odyssey: 1. an extended adventurous voyage or trip. 2. an intellectual or spiritual quest: *an odyssey of discovery.*

The name chosen for this wondrous opportunity provided to us by the caring, compassionate, and exceptional staff is well suited. Odyssey both challenges and allows me to transcend into other worlds or realities. It has helped me to accept, prevent, and overcome certain aspects of life and to become a stronger and more vivacious individual. The lessons learned in Odyssey transcend the boundaries of the classroom and extend to my family and everyone I come in contact with. I will become a more efficient and productive person by continuing to be a part of the Odyssey Program. I believe that I can complete my metamorphosis and shine brightly, as a butterfly fluttering in the wind, if I am allowed to remain a member of the Odyssey Family. . . .

Being a part of the Odyssey Family has been a blessing. I have been able to work towards my goal of earning my MBA and to become more acclimated to the changes I must make in order to truly succeed both scholastically and within my personal and business relationships and ventures. This experience has affected not only my life, but the lives of my family as well. Since being accepted into the Odyssey Program, I have begun to rediscover my love of reading novels, to read and recite poetry, and to reawaken my artistic soul. I have begun to write poetry again. I now recite to my family my poems and others from famous poets featured in the textbooks provided by Odyssey. We all enjoy it tremendously. As a result, they get to see a side of "Keith" or "Daddy" that has been long



forgotten and buried deep within, like a pirate's booty looted on the open seas. There is treasure inside of us all; we must dig deep inside ourselves in order to marvel in its splendor and grace. Odyssey has given me the shovel.

Odyssey has helped me in many ways. I have been introduced to a new set of friends to both share and learn from. I look forward to spending time with my newfound friends, both on and off campus. I have been invited to various events that I would not have tried had it not been for the Odyssey Project. As my horizons broaden, my eyes fill with a brighter spark of hope and motivation to accomplish my dreams, goals, and heart's desires. The network of support is helping to mold me into a better person, man, and father. I will utilize the resources available to me more effectively in order to put forth my very best while completing the program this year. I will submit my applications to the university and other institutions to continue my education and eventually earn my degree.

Odyssey has changed my life already, and I wholeheartedly desire to complete this program and learn all that I can while under the protective wings of angels: Odyssey Professors and Staff. I thank you for all that you have done to help me grow as an individual and take another step towards becoming the "complete me." I have enjoyed the inventive and proactive approach towards higher education and the learning process. You have started me on a quest. My odyssey will be a lifelong and proactive experience. Thank you again for your time, attention, and consideration.

Marilyn Johnson

Why should I be allowed to continue in the Odyssey Project for second semester? I feel the Odyssey Program is giving me the necessary tools to prepare me to further my education. Out of all the applications and essays received I was chosen. I was selected to be one of the 30 University students, and we are family now. Out of the 30 chosen, if one or two of us are



missing it's like an unsolved, unfinished puzzle. We all started out together, and we're all graduating together. Our Odyssey class is truly like a journey, a journey I want to finish. What I now know about our class, what I've learned, what I've added to it, and what I still want to accomplish will be hard to put in words, but I will try.

Knowing what I now know about our class includes that I'm learning Literature with Emily Auerbach, the Director of the Odyssey Project. She told us on the first day we'll be doing a lot of reading and writing, and that's what we've been doing. It's not easy; as a matter of fact, it's hard, but it's worth it. Emily is great. All the teachers are great. They are patient with us, and they are here for us for whatever help we need. I'm also learning Writing and Critical Thinking with Coach. He's teaching us big words I've never heard of before. He's showing us how to break the words up and learn the definitions of each word. I'm learning Philosophy with Jean Feraca, and she makes whatever she reads to us come alive. We have Art History with Gene Phillips and American History with Craig Werner; there are no dull moments. We have others that help out one way or another. I equally feel like they're family as well.

What I've learned is that all things are possible. I am blessed to be in the Odyssey Program. All these classes are very challenging, but I believe something great is going to come out of this for all of us. It's amazing all the books we've read, like Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave" and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. We read *Enrique's Journey*, and some of us have had the privilege to meet the author, Sonia Nazario. We have had the guest actor, Baron Kelly, who came and gave us warm up exercises and individual coaching techniques for all who participated—a real actor, OMG! He performed with one of our shyest classmates, Shaquida Johnson, and she's not shy anymore.

What I believe I add to the class is what I get out of it: completing all of my assignments and making sure my attendance won't affect my grade. My mind has been stretched almost to the limit, but that's okay. What is that saying—"a mind is a terrible thing to waste"? I feel my mind has been on hold much too long. For years I've been afraid to learn

fractions because I didn't learn it in grade school. I didn't catch on, I didn't get it, and I was afraid to ask too many questions because I didn't want to be laughed at. When you're used to hearing "you're dumb," that stays with you for a long time. I'm not afraid anymore. I say bring it on!

What do I still want to accomplish? I want my Associate's Degree. I want to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. If I'm still on the waiting list when I graduate from the Odyssey Project, I'll take up Phlebotomy or something in the same field to keep my mind occupied until my time to complete the LPN program. I've also been thinking for a while now about writing a book.

Nkechi Johnson

I believe I should continue my second semester in the Odyssey Project because I have grown in these three months more than I have all year. Don't get me wrong: I have grown up throughout the year, but I have learned more about myself in these last three months than I have all year long. Odyssey is helping me learn who I am and accept who I am. I am finding myself telling people about it.

I may not come out of the class a writer or poet, but I will come out of this wonderful, blessed Odyssey a winner because I hopefully will have found my voice by the end of class. I hope to have overcome my Social Anxiety Disorder so I can say something at graduation and not be scared, just nervous. I want to leave with confidence. I want to have a voice within myself that will shock myself along with others that know me.

I believe I deserve to continue this journey in Odyssey to see what I can conquer in this beautiful experience that I have been accepted into. I have dealt with all the obstacles and overwhelming struggles and blessings I have had to deal with throughout the semester better than I did a year ago. I would have quit, but I am tired of being a quitter and not doing what is best for me. Thank you for this blessing in the journey of Odyssey. Thank you,



Emily, Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Wanda Auerbach, Coach, Jean Feraca, Gene Phillips, Craig Werner, and last but not least Diane Dennis.

Shaquida Johnson

The Odyssey class is amazing. It is a goal-seeking, outstanding, fulfilling invention; I could go on about this wonderful opportunity. Before starting this class I have always been determined to have a brighter future and to have a better life for my son, but there were always roadblocks in my way.

I wanted to go to school and be able to have that dream career I always wanted, but I wasn't able to afford school, and with no education there's no career job. So I continued to juggle a morning, evening, and third shift job while raising my son, who is a toddler. It is difficult raising him as a single parent and making sure I raise him with good morals and values. I make sure I am able to keep him in daycare where he is able to learn and grow. I just want to be able to have him secure in life.

My first semester with the Odyssey Project has made me whole, a more educated person and more diverse with others. I even discovered my special gift with the help of Baron Kelly. Also it has opened my eyes to other exciting things besides what I have grown up learning. I have been to my first book presentation [Sonia Nazario's talk on *Enrique's Journey*] and to the Christmas concert with the Madison Symphony.



Honestly and truthfully, I believe I should be able to move on to the second semester because I learned so much and would like to continue to learn more. It has also been a blessing to be able to see myself grow and be able to pass down what I've learned to my son. It's more of a thrill to tell others about my journey.

Billie Kelsey

Having been the recipient of the gift of a seat on the Odyssey bus, I would like to continue to the end of the line. I feel that I have done a good job of soaking up the knowledge and opportunities presented to me thus far, and I look forward to the rest of the tour and the various stops to be made. My perspective of this journey is that it has made a family of all of those along for the ride, and I appreciate being a member of this particular family and all the differences we bring to our travels together. That being said, I am not ready for the journey to be over or any separation from the other participants. I know that I definitely want more time to get to know people more and better, as well as watch how everyone's life moves forward with the skills that we gain.

My reason for applying to this opportunity was for the support it would provide me in reaching my goal of at least finishing my Bachelor's degree, and I knew that my writing skills were rusty. With the work we have been assigned, I have been able to dust the cobwebs off my writing skills. I like how my words flow more easily from my brain to the pen or keyboard, and I like the confidence in myself that ensues from a check or a check plus on a completed assignment. These things ease my fears around my ability to be able to accomplish what I have set out to do.

The safe space provided for us as a group that is predominantly people of color to learn, ask questions, and think and speak out loud is something that has been a very small part of my education experience; especially the safe part. I



appreciate this as well as the fact that white students are included; we all benefit from a diverse class. Racism is omnipresent in all our lives, whether intentional or not, and I'm glad for all of us that we are assumed to be intelligent, capable people with many talents worth sharing.

As the first half of our trip nears, I think of how it must feel for a group of individuals to go on an extended trip with people they don't know. As they all experience everything that the journey has to offer together, they become a family of sorts who work together, sometimes play together, and most importantly combine their individual odysseys together in a way that lets each member of the family know that they are not alone in their quest for knowledge and a better life.

During our last semester, I would like to try and reach out to set up more concrete relationships with my fellow students and hope that we can figure out ways to continue to support each other in the future. At the minimum I think we can be great resources for each other as we travel our own separate odysseys. We can share the knowledge we gain as individuals for the benefit of us all.

Beatriz Mairena-Kellman

For me, having this class has been like being born out of an egg. It has been an explosion of progress in reading, writing, and understanding English. With this class I have worked very hard, but it has been good because I have had the opportunity to learn how to write, read, and speak better. This class is the best I have ever had as a student in this country. I get a lot of love and care from the teachers and students. The faculty members, including our guests, give us support and motivation.

I want to thank Dr. Emily Auerbach and her family for their generous financial support to help adults and families who need financial help to continue their education so we can have a better future and improve our life in this country.

Throughout my studies, we have had great writers and thinkers: William Blake, Thomas



Jefferson, Martin Luther King, Emily Dickinson, Sonia Nazario, and others. From their stories I have learned that humanity and society have always had difficult problems. I learn from them that it is important to defend our rights and to not back down. I was so impressed about Socrates' life. I will always remember what he said: "I neither know nor think that I know." I learned from them that I have to have courage to dream my dreams and follow them.

By studying 30 to 40 hours a week including weekends, I am improving my reading and writing and am learning to enjoy literature, art, and history. I will have confidence to continue my studies.

Brandon McCarey

When reminiscing on the past semester as an Odyssey student, I realize that I didn't know there was so much I was lacking in as a college student both in academics and overall survival strategies. I still need improving in my writing—in particular, my grammar and punctuation—and I need to be more proactive in taking advantage of the resources available to me as both an MATC and UW student. Odyssey has definitely been the best experience I've encountered regarding education. I appreciate the dedication of the staff, the challenging work, and the support of my fellow classmates. Having the Odyssey Project in my corner has made my second semester at MATC more enjoyable and encourages me to exert the same energy I show for Odyssey into my other courses.

November and December have been rough this year because of having to deal with depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder. I've fallen behind in my classes and currently I'm working hard to make that up. There were many days when I didn't want to attend class at MATC, and sadly I did skip days on purpose because of my darkened mood. However, I would always look forward to Odyssey, and I made it a priority that Wednesday nights would be hallowed time for education and



intellectual pursuits. Yes, learning and knowledge are sacred to me.

I'm not always the best student, but Odyssey reminds me of church in some respects. We learn the good news of literature, art, philosophy, and history accompanied with a plethora of topics to cover. The course is a constant foray into different subject matters that I have come to appreciate. College shouldn't be a rigid, systematic, one-dimensional experience consisting only of homework, grades, and studying. College has so much more to offer than grades and credits. Odyssey exists on the cusp of both community and higher education. It's a course that's daring enough to be outside of the box while simultaneously prepping its students for the demands and culture of college life. For the disadvantaged and the ones society at one time may have deemed unteachable, Odyssey is the underground movement of higher education, telling the community that tuition payments are not what makes a student an intellectual. Lacking finances for college shouldn't have to doom a person to a life of unfulfilled ambitions and a missed chance at success.

I desire to continue my education with Odyssey in conjunction with MATC. I've made some mistakes and had setbacks, but I feel I have evolved intellectually since September of this year. I know Odyssey will only improve me further, and I'm anxious to see what semester two will bring.

Kenya Moses

I believe I should be able to continue in semester two because I have so much to gain from being in the class. I have learned how to use words correctly when writing, and that's awesome. For example, my Economics teacher was teaching the class, stopped writing, and asked which word he should use; I was able to answer the question. I have seen tremendous growth in my ability to articulate myself, write generalized statements, and help my children with their homework. I am determined to continue this





growth, and I feel that this class will be essential to my moving forward in that manner.

I am very proud of myself for the determination and effort that I have put forth in this class, and I can see nothing but continued positive growth if I am allowed to continue next semester. The History portion of this class helped to broaden my horizons, and I have been introduced to poetry and literature that I probably would not otherwise have been exposed to. I find myself musing at times when I recognize a line from Shakespeare or when I am recounting something that I have learned in class. In order to be a functioning, prosperous member of society, one has to have an education that is fully encompassing and allows one to access areas to which one normally would not be accustomed. I feel that this class is providing that opportunity for me, and I look forward to continuing on and becoming the woman that I know that I can be.

Simply said, I have more to gain and less to lose with continuing the class. I have also enjoyed working with Coach learning how to tackle big words and pronounce them correctly! My children enjoy coming to class with me. My seven-year-old son said, "Mommy, I pray you get your college degree." This program has been a blessing to me and my family. I am honored to have been chosen in the first place. My goal is to continue on with my education no matter what happens in my life. I would like to say thanks to my Odyssey classmates. I learned so much from them as well, and I look forward to learning with them again!

Juba Moten

If Odyssey were a jigsaw, then I would be a piece—probably not the biggest piece, most definitely not the brightest piece, nor the smartest, but assuredly I would be an important piece. Without me or any of my other 29 classmates, this jigsaw could never be complete.



Yes, I know that we all come from different backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life, but this is what makes this particular jigsaw a puzzle. How, may I ask, did we come to be in such unison, on the same accord, on a journey to something we never had before and that has never been offered to us before?

God works in mysterious ways, and I know this to be true; therefore, I should remain in the Odyssey Program because I as a member of the student body adore and admire our amazing journey. Besides, I am still trying to figure out this jigsaw puzzle. I will continue to work hard to do it as well as to complete the program in high regard and with honors.

Tai’Kiah Phillips

I believe that I should be allowed to continue in the Odyssey Project for second semester because there has been so much I have learned since starting the program, and there is so much more I can learn by the finish. I have developed greatly both mentally and intellectually, and words can never even begin to explain exactly how much. This program has helped me to better understand myself, my life, and my school habits, as well as give me a chance to gain more knowledge in subjects I was unsure of before.

In my first year in college, there were lots of things going on in my life that made me feel



discouraged and made me lose confidence in my ability to do well in school. The Odyssey Project has helped me to begin reconstructing that confidence. Slowly but surely I am finding my way and enjoying my success. It has motivated me to do better and to never give up on myself.

The professors of the Odyssey Project are very influential and supportive. The fact that they actually care about their students is all the more reason why I want to succeed in the program and graduate. They are a huge part of my motivation. These people, as well as my classmates, have grown on me and have become closer to me than I could ever have imagined. They are my family.

This semester has been great, but if I'm allowed to continue for second semester, the latter will be even better. My classmates and I still have so much to learn from one another. The class as a whole has taught us to trust one another and believe in ourselves. I am appreciative of this opportunity and am looking forward to another great semester.

Katie Pruitt

Being a single mother, I always try to provide for my two children the best that I can. The UW Odyssey Project is an important part of my plan to be able to do that. I deserve to continue in the program next semester because I have the drive to succeed. I am also in need of the assistance it offers and understand and appreciate all the help given.

A little over two years ago, I realized that renting my housing would not be a smart choice for my family in the long run and it would be wiser to buy a home. I applied for and was accepted to Habitat for Humanity, which was a huge blessing. One of the requirements was to complete 325 hours of work for Habitat for Humanity, to be completed before the house was finished. Not having much free time to begin with, I was a little overwhelmed at first, but I approached it in the same way I approached the Odyssey Project: wholeheartedly and with a willingness to try as hard as I could.



I enjoyed working with and getting to know all of the Habitat employees, volunteers, and fellow homeowners. I was relieved and elated when my hours and work were completely and I was finally able to sign the mortgage on the house.

Now that our house legally belongs to my family and we have made that house a home, I need to get to work on securing it. I know that having a college education is an integral part of obtaining a reliable, good paying job. I have worked at CapTel Inc. for over six years and have gone from transcribing telephone calls to reception work, recruiting and interview taking, and HR clerical duties. My work ethic and reliability have gotten me this far, but my job title is still the same as when I began at the company. The only things missing from my career goal at the moment are a respected job title and a pay rate to match. I feel that an Administrative degree is the key to those things.

I am a very patient person who is willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve my goals for the sake of my children. I refuse to give up on anything I believe in, and I believe in the work the Odyssey Project is doing. This opportunity I have been granted will not go unappreciated.

Elvira Rodriguez

My future is in your hands, Odyssey Project. I would like to have the opportunity to continue working on my odyssey for the following reasons: Odyssey has become part of my dream of going back to school, and it has changed my thought from *maybe* to *it will be!*

First, coming back to school was something I always wanted. I have always loved school, but for many reasons I was never able to stay in it when I was little. Nevertheless, when I got older and became a mom, that did not stop me: I went back to school and finished high school. I did not take the right classes that I was supposed to have, so my writing is really poor at this very moment. But when I heard of Odyssey, my first thought was that I am finally



coming back to school. My head started dreaming about what I left behind.

Odyssey is what I really want to have as long as I can have it because it gives me the emotion to not stop on my studies. It gives me the power of wanting to read what I was given in class. This is something I never had before, and that's what I was looking for. I know that if I am interested in reading, my writing and understanding will increase. Thanks to Odyssey, I will be able to reach my goal and stop thinking about a maybe.

I will do my best like I have been doing. I ask you to please excuse me if my homework is not right all the time. I am working on it to present a better job for the following semester.

Arnella Royal

I want to start by saying how much I am thankful for all the teachers, all the patience they implemented upon us, but most of all for the entire class! I could not have imagined a better group of people to share this journey with. You all encourage me to bring out the very best that I have to offer by participating in this class. When I first started this class, I was under the impression that there was going to be a less vibrant class than what I received. We've turned out to be a well-oiled machine, I must say!

From this experience, my perspective on life has changed in general. I want to get the most out of this class that I can possibly get. I've never been a part of something that has as much value to one's most inner capabilities. I know that I can succeed now, through the encouragement of the Odyssey Project. I can now persevere through all my fears of not succeeding in my adult life. Being here has brought meaning to my life. I can now be as creative as I've ever been.

I read more books than I've ever had to in my adult life. Not only are they interesting, but they cover true life stories that I wasn't aware of. It was so powerful to learn the story of Frederick Douglass and his account as a young slave, persevering



through the constant ridicule, making sure that his future was to become an educated Black Slave! I now have the mentality that whatever you set your mind to will be the outcome of greatness! Journeying with Enrique's perseverance was the most touching to my heart. (You see, I only read these kinds of stories via television!) The kind of movies that keep a fictional imagination going on in your head were not healthy for me. There is more History to be told through reading real life-conquering stories. These stories will encourage me to have a true value to Human Life and to always be there for someone who will one day need me.

As a child, I wasn't as confident as I am now. I feel this is all on account of Mrs. Mary Rouse: she saw something within me that I never knew was there. During one lunch, she knew that I should be a part of this magnificent Odyssey group. Mary and my daughter Jammie were determined to get me in a different mindset. You see, the three of us would have lunch at least twice a year to keep my daughter on track with her school. (All along I was being eyed as a potential college student as well!) After three years of lunch meetings, with the subject of "Odyssey Project" in the conversation, I agreed to fill out an application. I have to say this was one of the most positive moves I've made in a very long time!

In conclusion, I want to thank you for even considering me to be a part of such a successful project. Thanks for giving me another chance to shine through writing. Not too many people have the opportunity to be a part of something so valuable, something they can carry with them for the rest of their lives! I promise to take in as much as you all give me. I will put forth all that's in me to make you all proud!

Hedi Rudd

I think that of all the things that I have done in my lifetime, Odyssey is the one that will truly stay with me until I am once again dust. It has helped me to move all of the pieces of my life into position, providing a platform from



where I can launch myself into the direction that I have always wanted to go. Prior to Odyssey I felt scattered and ill-prepared. While I still have a few obstacles to overcome, I feel better equipped to hurdle them.

Writing has always been my passion. Storytelling is what got me through all of the challenges of life. It was my light in a world full of darkness. I denied myself the pleasure, however, as I felt that it was a luxury I could not afford. In my mind, writers were irresponsible. Having a family to care for, I set it aside, ignored the longings, and did what I felt a responsible parent should do. Now I know that if I don't do it, I will never see the light. Darkness, however, is no longer an option.

With Odyssey, I am finding the blueprint that escaped me; the instructions on how to put my life together. I attempted college in the past, and while I did well, I faltered when I took English Literature and Philosophy. Those were the last two classes I took, and I dropped them both. The instructors were not reaching me, and I was convinced at that point that I was not college material. Now I laugh at myself when I think about that fear. I now have new friends named William Lloyd Garrison, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and Plato. Whenever I am at a loss for words, I have a reservoir to draw from of words for every occasion.

Plato has become my companion. I take him with me everywhere I go, introducing him to friends as if we had coffee that morning and will dine together at night. I share the *Allegory of the Cave* with those I feel are dwelling there and those who feel I escaped and are wondering why others are not listening to them as they attempt to free them. Sor Juana gave me the words that described my soul and the feeling that I struggled with as I was not like the other girls. Never caring for material things or men's money, I thought I was odd and wanted out of my head. Now I feel that I have a soul sister who paved the way for me to be who I am. Garrison gave me a rallying cry with the words "I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD."

While I continue to work on finding my

own voice, my own allegory, my own poems and prose, I am thankful that I had the bread crumbs provided by Odyssey to get me to my future destination. I know now that I can write freely, with no need to hide my words for future generations to uncover. I can let my light shine now, with creativity and confidence.

Eugene Smalls

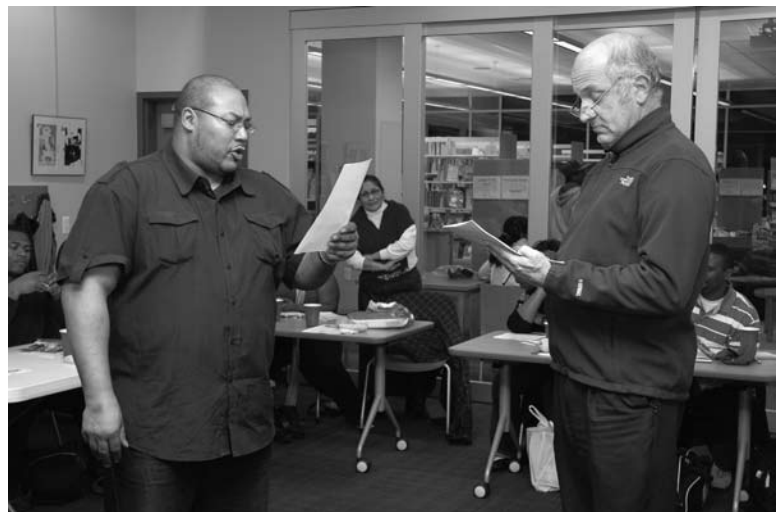
I've been in Odyssey for one whole semester, and I can honestly say I am Odyssey and Odyssey is me. I am inside of Odyssey and Odyssey is inside of me.

I don't know what it would do to me if I didn't have Odyssey.

It's too late for all that. Odyssey is inside my blood as much as Jesus is.

The day that I was not able to make it to Odyssey class because of sleep apnea made me very angry with myself. Then I went through the stages of being sad and depressed, and I missed all my classmates. I think about you all the time. I pray for you always. I can't imagine you not in my life. You have had such an impact on my life.

I was sitting back in my Lazy Boy chair just the other day. No one was home but me, and I began to think about all the good times we have had learning together, whether it was voice exercises with Dr. Baron Kelly and laughing uncontrollably with Elvira, or doing skits of *Macbeth* with Billie or



defending an Emily Dickinson poem with Tai'Kiah, Kenya, Abraham, Brandon, Run, and Donta. It has been so much fun.

I never thought learning could be so much joy. I can't imagine me not being part of it.

Furthermore, I don't know what kind of effect Graduation Day will have on me. I think I will probably cry because I have fallen in love with you all and am going to miss you all tremendously.

Donta Starr

Being asked why I should continue in this class makes me think hard because I think all of the people in our class deserve to be here the second semester. I'm learning from them every day I come to class, even if I don't agree with them on a subject. I feel I need this class. It keeps me level headed and open minded. It also helps me because I'm a slow learner. Hearing what others have to say helps me think in more than one way and take things in from more than one point of view.

It helps me to be around positive people because right now is the first time I have had a holiday without my mother. It hurt so bad this Thanksgiving that I cried days after and still do. I know it's going to be hard. That's why I keep pushing and tell myself thanks that we have people like you and my classmates around.

Whether they know it or not, everybody has something to give. At this hard time in my life, I'm



still trying to figure things out and it scares me. If I don't push myself, I won't find out what I can give. Being in this class is the start of the push. I won't stop pushing no matter what and will try my best to get the work done. . . .

My mind is hungry for more. I am starting to understand that I'm not stupid and shouldn't feel down because of what I don't know. I'm here to learn, and I am learning slow and sometimes fast. I don't have the time to just give up now in your class. I have to push. From the beginning of this class you have taught us not to give up on ourselves and to try hard because this will not be easy. I am trying to still learn because without this support group I think I would not even have tried to go back to school. We are all here together now and there's no looking back: we will go full speed ahead with all the lights on.

I also want to learn more about U.S. History. I suck at it, but I'm making a little progress. Progress is the key because it shows that I'm learning a step at a time. Yes, they are small steps right now, but I know I have big steps to come. This class will show me not to be scared of the big steps because now I'm ready, thanks to the help of the Odyssey Program and hard work. So I thank you for this opportunity. Every day I wake up and tell friends about this program because it has helped me as a person and is refreshing my mind.

Linda Thao

This first semester in the Odyssey Project didn't just change me for the better, but it has also taught me so many things that I've never learned before. Odyssey isn't like any other regular classes that you take in school. Odyssey is a place where you teach yourself and your classmates.

Odyssey is a place where you learn your own strengths, talents, or skills you've never known that you had in you. It's also a place for friends and family where you can be able to express your true self to others, share your skills, your thoughts, your personality, and your voice.



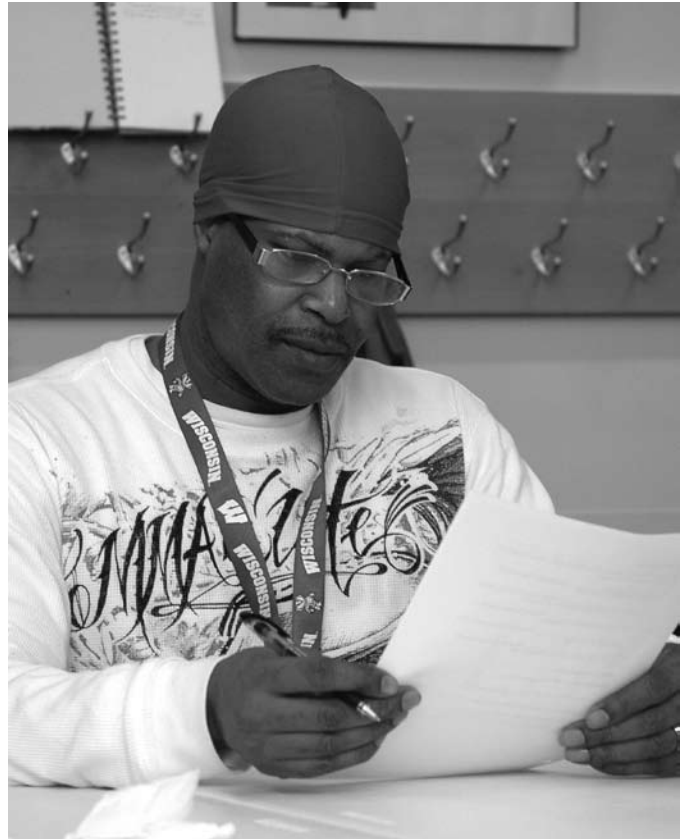
For example, Emily put our “lives in the cave” in the Odyssey Oracle. With every subject we learn, the Bible, God, or Jesus comes into the discussion. Not a lot of Hmong people believe in the Bible, but I learned that the words in the Bible can be related to “The Declaration of Independence” or Socrates’ “Apology.” Writing poems wasn’t easy for me, as well as understanding what the meaning of a poem was, but every day I try writing my own poems by using my lifestyle. Every time I come upon a difficult word, I highlight it, look it up in the dictionary, and write it down on a piece of paper to memorize it. Art was another thing I found interesting. During the time when Gene Phillips was showing us a power point, we learned art can have such an interesting history, from back in Greek times till now. . . .

Looking back at the first semester, it did seem hard to open myself up to others, but as I got to speak up a little, I felt more comfortable. I feel I am starting to accomplish something by trying to speak up and stop hiding behind a desk. I understand that you cannot learn anything from plagiarizing, and that it’s OK to ask for help when needed.

Being in the Odyssey Project means a lot to me. I know that this class can help put me on the right path for my future. Everybody learns something new every day. I don’t want to be a person who quits all the time or who will fall behind. I want to be a student who can be able to do anything with my English writing, speaking, and reading. I know I can be in that position if I’m in the Odyssey Project.

Abraham Thomas

The Odyssey Project required that each participating student write a short essay explaining why they should be accepted in the program. In my response, there are three main points that I believe will support how being accepted to the program has deepened my passion to continue as an Odyssey student. As I mentioned in the #3 issue of the Odyssey Oracle, I had hoped to use the experience



in class to chart a new direction in my life.

The first point of support why I should continue as an Odyssey student is the awesome classroom and homework study assignments, like Socrates. I’ve recently learned from reading Socrates how to use integrity effectively in my personal life and what it means to have integrity. One way I’ve decided to use integrity in my life is by developing healthy principles to live by, knowing and understanding my likes and dislikes in order to allow me to center myself. Since joining the class, my approach to people in general has changed. I’m more open-minded and sensitive to others. I have always asked the question why, and studying Socrates has confirmed many of my beliefs that knowledge is freedom. Thirsting for knowledge is a natural entity given to each and every one of us.

The second point that articulates why I should continue in Odyssey is trust. At this point the Odyssey Project is responsible for building trust in me, and this is something that I must acquire for healthy living. My passion for helping my community all involves trust. I must develop it in order to share it with those who need it most. My sincere goal is to continue pursuing a degree in the humanities and social work or become a community

activist. First I must complete this odyssey. This will be the first step to accomplishing my passionate goal of helping people in the community.

The third point for why I should continue in Odyssey is that this program has become a part of all my future goals. When I accepted this opportunity, I did so with a firm belief of becoming a graduate and using this program as my first step to a brighter future. This step includes a good education as a core principle. Odyssey in the first semester has confirmed many of my beliefs as to why education is an essential part of any chance that I have to open doors to a new area in life that I've never experienced. My success is not motivated by any monetary gain. All my life I've had this inner voice whispering for me to pursue a good, solid education. My life has been a work in progress, and I believe that walking through the door of education will release a new, healthy, valuable, and responsible human being.

To sum up, the Odyssey Program has helped me to gain a healthy swagger about myself. I should continue in Odyssey because I am Odyssey.

Michelle Withers

As I am sitting here at the hospital with my son, I have time to think about many things going on in my life, as well as time to think about why I should remain in the Odyssey Project second semester.

Sometimes I wonder do I really belong here. Do I have enough "wrong" in my life preventing me from being where I want to be and who I want to be? Maybe there are ones who need this more than I do. I sit in class and watch. I watch way more than I should. I want to participate more, but then someone may jump in and over. Maybe they need to hear themselves more than I do. So I just sit back and soak up the information and knowledge.

I don't want others to portray me as

attention wanting or needing, but at the same time yes, I have needs. Yes, I have wants. Don't we all? I have a lot going on outside of the classroom that I don't share. I'm having job harassment issues, and due to that I'm close to losing my house. Instead of working right now, I'm sitting here at Meriter with my son.

Things just aren't going my way, and it's hard for me to be open and express as I've never really had much help. I've almost always been in the "you don't qualify" situation, so I've gotten to where I depend on no one and have just learned to shut down, to expect failure. Do I deserve to feel like this? At times I would say yes, as this is the behavior I've learned to accept. Do I want to feel like this? No! This is where the Odyssey Project comes in. This journey is helping me find myself and then to move forward from there.

I may be quieter than most, but I really try to soak in everything. I have encountered great opportunities and eye openers, such as meeting and listening to Sonia Nazario speak. Another was visiting the Chazen Art Museum. I have returned





there on my own many times to escape and hide in the land of Art. I've met and learned from many interesting people there from all walks of life. The Odyssey Project has introduced me to many authors and subjects, some of which I knew but many that I had not. I continue daily working on grammar, punctuation, and so many other areas that will help

me through this journey.

There are times when I'm feeling overwhelmed, but I really am looking to take full advantage of the many more opportunities that the Odyssey Project and UW have to offer. Just as I stated in the beginning how Odysseus was on his journey home to become king, I am still on my journey (just having more forks, curves, and detours) home to become me—a queen of my success.

