

ODYSSEY ORACLE

WELCOME, CLASS OF 2023!



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Pictured on pp. 1-6 are some of our many Odyssey graduates who have earned associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees from Madison College, UW-Madison, Edgewood, and other schools: Shaimaa Ahmed '16; Zeynab Ahmed '14; Ahmad Alkheder '17; Sherreallyum Allen '05; Keena Atkinson '10; Brian Benford '07; Sherri Bester '08; Michelle Bozeman '11; Lavern Brown '09; Michelle Brown '05; Kegan Carter '04; Luci Chikowero '14; Dominique Christian '09; China Moon Crowell '13; Yolanda Cunningham '12; Cameron Daniels '07; Jelissa Edwards '16; Jayvonna Fleming '16; Tom Gardner '08; Molinda Henry '07; Tiffany Hite '04; James Horton '08; Yasmin Horton '08; Shaquida Johnson '12; Milli Lau '14; Shanita Lawrence '09; Joanna Lopez '05; Josephine Lorya '08; Michael Lozano '11; Tasha McKenzie '10; Adrian Molitor '18; Shirley Norman '04; Nicole Barnett Pecku '09; Lolita Phillips '13; Jaleah Price, Odyssey Junior; Edwina Robinson '11; Sahira Rocillo '15; Mustafa Saed '16; Umaina Saed '16; Corey Saffold '06; Kala Taylor '16; Marisela Tellez-Giron '16; Mai Neng Thao '16; Dauntrea Vance, Odyssey Junior; Anthony Ward '04; Mary Wells '07

LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2023

Dear Odyssey Class of 2023 . . .



You feel that nervous energy? Excitement fused with uncertainty? Embrace it! As time goes by, you'll miss those moments. Just do me one favor. Whenever you're unsure of yourself, just remember that there's beauty in the process. You have what it takes, and you're here for a reason. The torch has been handed to you guys, and we do so proudly. I look forward to seeing you all graduate. Knock 'em dead. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**



Congratulations to all 30 new students who have decided to go to college and have a life-changing opportunity with the Odyssey Project. You are beginning a new chapter in your life and have so many great opportunities waiting

for you.

Class of 2022 wasn't easy for me personally, but I am proud to say that I made it. Coming into the program, I was nervous and really didn't know what I was doing at the time of me becoming an Odyssey student. I had mixed emotions when I first started class, but then everything changed. I got to know my wonderful teachers and other individuals within the two semesters of class, along with my classmates. The Odyssey Project was the best thing that came into my life while I was dealing with depression and homelessness. Odyssey became my family and, most of all, my support system. Our social worker, Mr. Brian, was a great person to get to know and communicate with. He helped me with resources I knew nothing about. Christina and Em worked hard with keeping students on track and

making sure everyone was on the same page and had all the tools we needed for class. Mr. Kevin got me back writing poetry and eager to learn new writing techniques. Char also made sure we all got food in class. Ms. Emily gave me an opportunity to rewrite the story of my life, and I thank God for that every day. Odyssey has changed my life, made me see light, and helped me feel that things can really change in your life if you are willing to accept that change.

You come into Odyssey empty-handed and graduate with a whole new state of mind. Class of 2023, have fun, learn new things, try new things, and, most of all, go all the way and push as hard as you can to complete all your work. Everyone works as a team, so never be afraid to open up and ask for help.

Good luck, and I can't wait to see everyone walk across the stage for graduation. Class of 2023, YOU GOT THIS! **(Amanda Bell)**





Hey, welcome, new Odyssey members! Congratulations on being picked to join this family. Honestly, you are going to have to work hard in Odyssey, but it will be so worth it. There are plenty of people here who have your back and that will help you along the way. I was very nervous I wouldn't be able to complete Odyssey when I first started, but with the help of Emily and the Odyssey family we all made it through. I want you guys to think about who you are as a person now when you start this class and think about who you want to be at the end of the Odyssey journey. Take notes each class and show up to class ready to participate and you will do great! **(Brandyn Bess)**



I'll tell you ahead of time that this experience that you are about to embark on will leave you feeling honored and privileged to have been an Odyssey Project participant. Understand that this experience will be not only good but great.

Allow Odyssey to take you out of your comfort zone. We don't know if we like something until we've tried it. My advice to you is to just let it happen for you. Don't let anything get in the way of exploring yourself and learning more about yourself. Whether you are old or young, take this trip of self-improvement. When you know better, you do better.

Allow Emily and other Odyssey staff to help you overcome barriers you face that can possibly prevent you from completing the Odyssey Project. That has to be the most unique quality of Odyssey Project to me. You won't fail because they won't let you fail.

Know that you are as good as anybody else. Even during the bad times of your life, you are worthy of knowledge for self-improving, no matter what your situation may be. Know that any obstacles you

face you can overcome. Know that if you are still here that you are still here for a reason. Your mission is not accomplished. There is more work for you to do. You are needed. You are worthy of empowerment. **(Ericka Booley)**



My mom was telling me she was applying for a program called Odyssey, and she was saying I should apply, too. Now, school isn't my strong suit, but I thought this was a great opportunity to experience with my mom while also working part time. Yes, it was a struggle, and soon after joining Odyssey and learning I was accepted, I got a full-time job doing in-home care. Going to school and working trying to make ends meet wasn't easy, but something about being in the classroom of Odyssey was very warm and comfortable. It just made you believe in yourself and gave you confidence.

By month two or three it seemed like things were going really well--working full-time, going to school, doing well, and enjoying both. But, of course, life happens, and I just got hit with the worst tooth pain ever. Man, this pain I don't know how to describe, but it took me out of work for two weeks. I even missed a couple classes of Odyssey. I missed a lot of nights of sleep. You would hope you could cry yourself to sleep, but the tooth pain



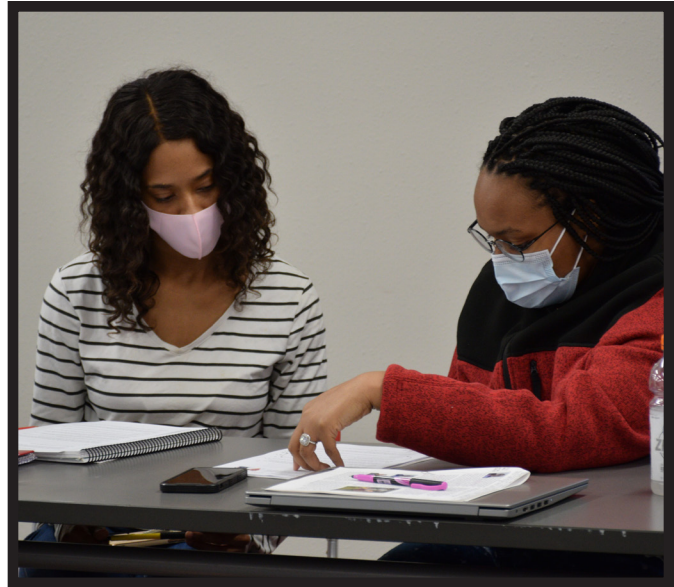
kept me up. I had to wait a month and a half because I was out of insurance benefits and that really sucks. . . . If I ever become rich, I promise I will open up on my expense a free dental clinic 24/7 for veterans and for everyone. I was blessed with Odyssey and God. I started getting money from Odyssey that really helped with my debt and paying off my tooth pulling. Thanks to Odyssey for helping me open my eyes, giving me confidence, and pushing me towards what I should do in life. I'm still thinking about it but I do know I want to help people and to open a 24/7 free dental clinic, an animal shelter, and a homeless shelter. I would love to do that before I leave this earth. Thanks to Odyssey for helping me choose this direction.

In a classroom with 29 other people something like me, we told stories. In the judge-free classroom, I listened to the stories and learned so much. Odyssey is changing lives. I honestly don't know where I would be without Odyssey. It's like a second family. I will definitely miss this class of 2022 but will stay in touch. Good luck to the Class of 2023! **(Jermaine Booe)**



The first thing I want to say is welcome to the beginning of a fresh journey. Everyone you believe wants the best for you should go through this journey with you. No one who wants you to succeed will watch you drown.

For the beginning to honestly be the beginning, you have to drop dead weight. Stop creating long heartbreaks, struggles, and depression. Odyssey may be hard. At your worst, you have to keep going. I gained 30 pounds from stress because my son had two seizures. Doctors weren't listening—but that didn't stop Emily from calling. She can be a headache, but she means well. Rest on her when you need help. Make it well-known what tutors you need! For me, it was Kevin. Never fall apart when you can change the outcome. Believe in yourself even if death comes in your family. Remember they wanted you to make it. You are your biggest supporter. Become who you need to be, want to be, and dream to be with Odyssey. Good work and congratulations on the start! You can contact me. **(Capri Booker)**



If you are reading this, you have been accepted into one of the best programs in Madison. This program opened my eyes and gave me the motivation and support I needed. I hope to be joining a college right after our graduation. Take advantage of this opportunity. Use the help and resources they provide for you. My best advice is to take time out of your schedule and set aside time to complete your homework and ask the staff questions. They are all here to help you and push you to achieve your goals. This program is only the beginning. After this program, you will be able to continue your education if that is something you want to do. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and come to class even when you're having a hard time completing your homework. This program is a judge-free place, and every staff member a part of Odyssey will be here for you with open arms. They are here to help you get to the finish line. **(Kayanna Branch)**



You are the Odyssey Class of 2023! You are amazing! You are amazing because Mrs. Emily and her staff choose amazing people. Just don't stop, don't quit! You will learn so much quality information. You will find yourself saying, "I want to learn more about that." The Odyssey class is fun, and you will learn amazing things. **(Katrina Collins)**



First, I want to start off by congratulating you. One congratulations is for actually taking the leap and interviewing for Odyssey, and a second congratulations for actually being chosen. Odyssey is like no other,

and you've made the best decision to be a part of it. Prior to Odyssey, my experience with school wasn't always the best. Although I was super afraid to give it another try, I'm glad I did. The support throughout Odyssey is unmatched. I doubted it myself and thought that I would not be able to complete Odyssey because I was a mother, amongst other obstacles in my life, but I swear you will succeed here.

When you first start, I'm sure you'll be looking around the room like I did, trying to find a familiar face or someone who you could relate to. Soon everyone you are in the room with now will seem like family. These people are just like you, afraid of the journey that's to come, and the good thing is that you have others right alongside you to walk the journey with you. You are going to do fine, so get all of those stereotypes out of your head or past experiences where teachers left you hanging and

it seemed like you were drowning to catch up. In Odyssey you have so much support, from tutoring and just being able to reach out to Emily any time you are stuck and have questions. So get settled and BREATHE! You will be amazing on your path to further your education.

Another piece of advice to leave you with is to never get discouraged or to feel like your writing is not good enough because nobody in this room is here to judge you or what you have been through. Another thing is to find and use your voice. Please be sure to reach out and communicate when you are struggling or in need. Remember, closed mouths don't get fed. You are going to do great things this year. Again, congratulations and good luck!

(Yasmine Dobbins)



Welcome to the start of your new future! That sounds corny, right? You have probably heard that before when you were going into school or work sometime in your life. Well, here this is no joke: I have not experienced before the lessons

and doors that will open for you upon taking this journey. You are UW students, and don't let anyone

tell you differently. For most of us, attending a big four-year college would only happen by playing sports, being super smart, or us having that perfect family with parents who can put us through school. It seems like a TV sitcom, but in our worlds with the diverse backgrounds we come from, we deal with hardship, whatever that may be. So, if you are serious about breaking barriers and family curses, you are in the right place.

Odyssey won't come easy; it's going to test you, in the long winter months, with depression, fatigue etc. Every



emotion will hit you. Don't fold because the reward is so much better. Strangers become family and if you are honest and a decent human being, the people in the class will become people you need to embrace over the two semesters. Homework will make you think this isn't just a small experience; the staff is going to work and bring the best version of you out. Ms. Emily and the staff that you will meet are one-of-a-kind, so if you are somebody who is wasting time and not going to take this seriously, do me a favor and let them know ASAP, because that spot you are wasting could be used for somebody who is in need and is on a mission.

The individuals involved are the few people in the world who are breaking barriers and trying to really shape the new future where minorities have a chance. They will break their backs to help you succeed. Most importantly, they will help you with whatever you need and will stay on top of it and find answers/resources. Please take this seriously. Nothing but best luck to you all, and I hope to meet you all, future UW alumni. In the words of somebody this world lost too early, "The Marathon Continues" (Ermias Nipsey Hussle Asghedom). Your Victory Lap is closer than you know, Blessings and Love to you. **(Ontario Frazier)**



Hello, classmates from another class year. You will be fine in this classroom setting. The teachers, tutors, and everyone involved in

Odyssey are understanding. In the beginning, it will feel like a classroom setting, but as the class goes on, it becomes close. It's a great setting for anyone who is looking to move forward with their studies. Don't be afraid to ask for help and open up, and share your experience and your struggles. Show how much of a wonderful human being you are. **(Errendira Giron Cruz)**

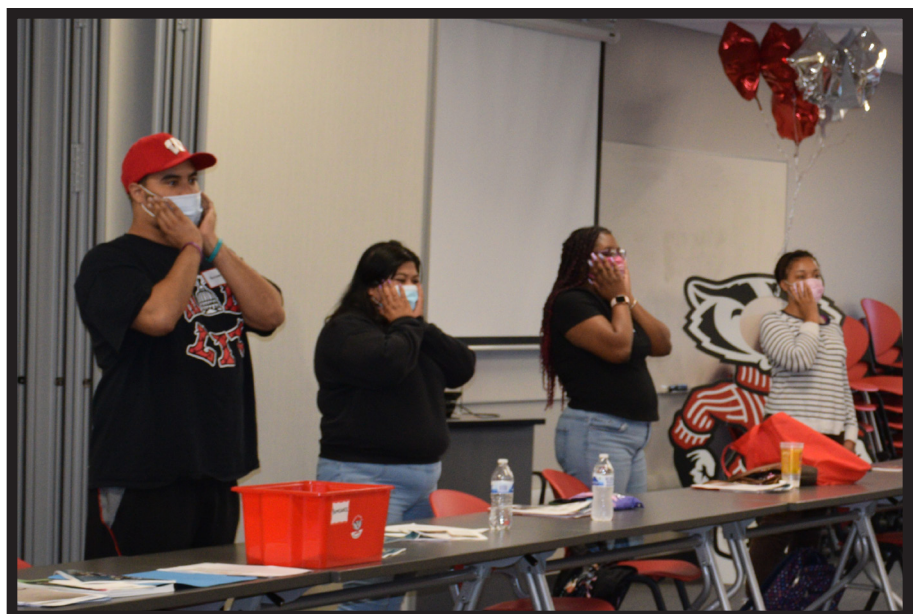


This year, thought me, that not only do I have the ability to be a working mother but also a student. Being in school before having a child, my focus and drive were just not there, almost like I needed something more. After having a child, you really have a different type of ambition, like you can conquer the world, so if balancing school, work, and life makes you feel intimidated, don't be. Wednesday nights are my favorite. Walking into class, you'll forget about everything happening outside of class. It truly is a very accepting and encouraging atmosphere. But if you are a shy person, I hate to break it to you but there is no such thing as being shy: you will go past your comfort zone and in the end will probably be the most outspoken of the group. Like they say in Mexico, "toma la vida por los cuernos": take life by the horns.

(Cynthia Gonzalez)



Welcome to Odyssey Class of 2023. Some of you may still be trying to figure out if this class is the one for you or if you have the ability to complete this class. Well, I'm excited to tell you, let all the worry go. This is a start to a journey that will not only bring your abilities



and skills out, but it will also make them better. You will grow so many ambitions to keep going not only through Odyssey but years after.

When I first got my acceptance letter from Odyssey, I questioned my decision of applying to the program. I was a mother of two toddlers, and I hadn't attended more than one semester of school since graduating high school, so my faith in completing the program was little to none. From the very beginning of Odyssey, those feelings were filled with confidence and faith. The program helped me change my "I can't do it" to "I Can."

It gets hard, but sometimes it gets exciting. There are so many experiences that are worth experiencing in the Odyssey program. This will be the journey you will hope that everyone around you one day will get to experience. So get your mind ready because from now until graduation it will be blown away with knowledge, faith, and happiness. You can do it! You're reading this today, and this is your "You can do it" message that you needed to hear. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**



I just want you to know class is going to be hard. You are going to want to give up. You are going to want to pull your hair out. You are

going to go through life trials. For example, I faced homelessness, auto-repossession, combative disputes that almost landed me in jail, and I tried to commit suicide. These are personal, but as you will soon find out, we are family. Let me be the first to say, "I love you" and "You are enough."

Your life will get hectic. I've gotten fired, quit, and struggled to get homework done. Lately i work 10 am-6 pm. I'm up all night. When I get to work, I'm drained. After work I have a three-year-old. She is a

handful. I know I only have one, but the amount of attention she needs is the equivalent of three children. Between work, homework, and my daughter, I'm pooped. My safe place is Dunkin. All of my friends are there and I can do my homework there. It's my safe place.

You have to decide what's more important, class or no class. I put my sleep aside to go to class. Class will get me out of my situation. Poverty, homelessness, and being in a financial struggle will always be here. Class is my ticket out of this situation. Class is my way out of this reality. **(Cinderria Harwell)**



This is going to be one of the best experiences of your life! You're going to meet so many new people, learn new things, and improve yourself overall as a person and a student. Everyone in Odyssey is going to support you in becoming your best self during this journey of your life! I hope you all have a great semester and an amazing odyssey throughout the year!

(Zaria Hunter)





Now (assuming you are in person), take a good look around the class. Odyssey is filled with rich histories and backgrounds, as well as diverse peoples in both ethnicities and perspectives. You are in for a treat! Additionally, I'm happy to inform you that this is where the competition with your peers ends. Moving forward, you don't have to worry about competing with anyone but yourself. This program is geared for you to grow academically and to help you find your voice. That being said, it's imperative to remember this feeling of joy as you received the email that you were accepted into the program. There will be many times during the course of the program in which you will have hardships and obstacles in your way that will prevent you from doing classwork. DO NOT GIVE UP. Remember the joy you felt today, and remember what it took to get here. You have the privilege of being part of this program, so take full advantage of that. Again, from the hundreds of applicants, only 30 of you were selected, so be proud and be committed.

Furthermore, it's critical to remember that in the face of adversity, you are not alone. Although you may feel that you are able to prevail without help, don't hesitate to reach out to the program. Everyone that's here is here for you to succeed. Odyssey has a great number of support systems in place, so use them! Only then can you truly persevere. Moreover, if you do end up falling behind, don't panic! Although not ideal, it's not

the end of the world; communicate with Emily and let her know what is happening in your life. One of the worst things you can do is go completely dark. Not only will people worry about you, but they won't be able to help you if they don't know what is going on. In addition, even if you fall behind on classwork, the most important part is to be present! Continue to go to class, continue to participate, and continue to ask questions! I cannot reiterate it enough: be curious, question everything, ask questions, and think critically of both what you are learning and your own bias that you may have on the matter.

Above all else, have fun! Odyssey is an incredibly inclusive environment for learning that touches many aspects of the humanities, from history, philosophy, writing, to much more. You will learn a lot throughout the year, and your mind will be opened to a lot of things you didn't know, so enjoy it! What's more, take notes of all of the new things that you learned while in Odyssey. It's incredibly rewarding to go back to your notes after a year of learning and see all of the tangible progress you have made. Sometimes it's easy to have everything fly by, but having notes on exactly what you learned is something I hope you find valuable like I did.

Before I let you go, I would be remiss if I didn't reiterate one more time to take full advantage of Odyssey and what it has to offer. One of the great gifts that comes with being a part of Odyssey is that you are a special student of UW Madison, one of the most prestigious universities in the country, possibly the world. As an Odyssey student, you are allowed to have a UW Student ID: use it! You are a student with the same privileges as any other student at UW. Go get discounts at the Union, go to the UW gyms, go to their programs, audit a class you would be interested in, play intramural sports, and go for a swim at the Natatorium. Everything on campus is open to you, so take advantage of it and, again, have fun. Congratulations on starting a new chapter of your life! **(Yael Jimenez Gonzalez)**





You can do this. The Odyssey Project community is amazing. Everyone in this class has grown and grown a relationship with one another. You did the hardest step. You signed up. You got accepted. You can do this.

My first day, I was so nervous. I hadn't been in a learning environment in over 18+ years. I hadn't studied for a test, read a chapter book, or sat in a class to learn and focus. Can I do this? was what I thought to myself. Luckily, I knew a few people so that made it a little easier. But throughout those two hours, I met 30+ new friends.

Odyssey staff are the best. They're very dependable, kind, and helpful. You made a great decision joining the Odyssey family. You're going to see so many changes in yourself, your reading, speaking, and writing. I see my growth in my job; I actually read my emails and articles that are given to me now. Stay focused, and stay on top of your homework assignments and reading. Ask for help no matter what; help is what got me through a lot of my procrastinating. I just had someone in tutoring go over my work with me to get their opinions or to help if I was stuck and didn't know where to start. Definitely take advantage of their wonderful vibes. I did it, and so can you! Believe in you.
(Crystal Johnson)



As you embark on this new journey of self-discovery through literature and a community of 30 of your peers, I want you to be open to the possibility that you're already a good writer. You were never a bad writer to begin with, and all you need will be a little push in the right direction.

The Odyssey Project is a judgment-free zone.



You don't have to worry about having the proper grammar, sentence structure, or the correct pronunciation. All you need is the willingness to learn and the willingness to be open minded. No matter what you're going through, it will never get downplayed or ignored. You can always ask for help because help is never a negative word in the Odyssey class. Help can just mean you need a little push, you need a shoulder to cry on, you need help with time management, or you just need a support in life. You're always welcome, no matter your color, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious background, because we are all a huge melting pot of diversity and love. I hope you find the Odyssey Project to be your wildest dreams. Welcome, Class of 2023! **(Helena Lee)**



Please be ready to bring all of you as you embark on an internal journey. Get ready to unpack what you thought was the truth and see a new reality. The Odyssey Project will bring you to a new awareness. You will laugh, be enlightened, and also get into your feelings. The people here have soul, compassion, and so much to give. You'll be a part of a community that keeps the weary growing and going. You're a part of a chain of change.
(Michelle Mack)



Get ready to met new people and learn so many new things. Coming into Odyssey I did not know exactly what to expect, but I am happy I chose taking the steps for a better future. Through Odyssey I gained the confidence I needed to further my education, and now I'm more motivated than ever to continue until I'm where I want to be! I'm so proud of the woman I'm becoming, not only for me but for my daughter as well. Don't be scared to participate, ask questions, or give your opinions. Odyssey is a judge-free zone where everyone is welcome to be themselves! I wish you guys the best of luck and pray you enjoy Odyssey as much as I did. **(Mariam Maiga)**



Congratulations! The hard part is over. From this point on, you have a new family and added support team. You are not in this alone, so look around the classroom, make friends, and say hello to someone. I will tell you this, there have been times when I did not want to get out of bed. My son overdosed, my husband was in the hospital, and my dad's dementia was getting bad. I got up anyway and had an enjoyable time. A lot of the class assignments are like a form of therapy. Listening to my classmates and other speakers

made me feel like I am not the only one going through something. My biggest regret is the class days I missed. **(Mashell McCarter)**



Welcome to the next chapter of your life. You're here for character development, and that's absolutely true because this class will definitely develop your character.

The plot twist is even though it's class, trust me, by the time it's completed you will love yourself for completing.

The future is yours. Let Odyssey help you create an amazing ending to YOUR story. **(Reginald Moore)**



You have just done a good thing. Odyssey was one of the best decisions you could ever make; at least, it was for me. The best advice I could say is believe in yourself. You are your biggest cheerleader, and so is everyone here at Odyssey. They are here for you no matter what. The teachers here at Odyssey don't ever judge you on anything, no matter what you are going through. They are here for you. If there is something you need help with, they will help you or try to find a resource on whatever it is. Even the classmates help you; Odyssey is like a big, blended family.

I met a lot of different people from all walks of life at Odyssey: even some people I went to high school with. Just know that Emily will do anything in her power to make sure everyone is successful in their journey at Odyssey. It's definitely going to be a journey, but don't worry. Everyone at Odyssey is rooting for you, and so am I. Congrats! **(LaRonda Morris)**





Although I did not give all of me as I should have, even with my trust and commitment issues I have a new outlook. I have a new way of expressing myself. I have a new way of learning. I have learned so much about myself, pushing barriers I could never see myself crossing before. I express my opinions openly without judgment, and I let my writing skills come to light. Even with the toughness of my pregnancy and childbirth, I was still supported and loved. I was weeks behind because life caught up. But with tutoring and hard work, I was able to get things done. No matter the situation, Ms. Emily, the sweetest woman I know, was always screaming, "GO, CYLINTHIA, GO!" Give your 100 percent effort, and do not hold back. Express your fears and insecurities and conquer them; you have made it this far.



WOW, you did it, Class of '23! You took the first step in your new journey. How did it feel? Was it a wobbly step? Was it full of uncertainty? Were you nervous the night before the first class?

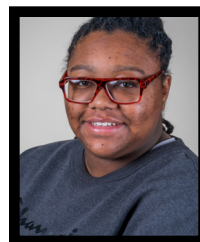
If the answer is yes, that's good. We all felt this way. You are not alone. In fact, you will never be alone again throughout this journey. Odyssey is a family. The instructors will always be available to you. The support is endless. Life might get crazy throughout the journey, but please trust the process. There is no judgment. The reward is great. The skills you will learn will unlock a power you didn't know you had in you. Some days will be harder than others. Some days you will have to dig deep. Do not quit because a better you waits on the other end. You've already taken the first step. Now take the second step. You are in motion. Welcome. **(Will Nunn)**



This is it, the beginning. This is the start to your journey, to want more, to do more. Like many of you, I was nervous my first time in class: new people, new surroundings, new challenges. But, you see, this is more than just a humanities course! This is a family; I have gained the best group of supporters in this program. I have truly gained a new family, a new opportunity, and a new life in this program.

They receive hundreds of applications. This program is not for the weak, only for the strong. I do not mean in the way you think either. I mean the strength of the ability to face your fears and challenges, making them come to pass. So, congratulations! You walked into the first step of changing your life forever. Have a great year. I am also here for support! My number and email will never change! Here's to the long walk!

Welcome to the family! **(Cylinthia Olle)**



Are you nervous? Do you feel less than capable of completing this program? Well, don't be. There are plenty of staff members and alumni to help you along your journey. Whether starting or continuing your education, this is a great place to start. This course not only will help you get a fresh start to get your feet wet, it will follow you throughout your educational journey. For example, if you have to write a science thesis or even do public speaking, this course will help you flourish. As a student in the Odyssey Program, you can look forward to certain scholarship programs or even funds to start your own business. This is a wonderful opportunity and a great start with the six college credits that you will gain in the end. **(Kimari Rogers)**



Welcome to a community of encouragement and support! Yes, you are here, you made it! Today is the day to know that you are not alone because your peers, teachers, and alumni will be here to encourage you to reach the

best version of yourself. The Odyssey Project was created by people like you and me, and it is an opportunity to grow personally and academically. Time passes by fast, so do your assignments, ask for help, and enjoy the evenings with this wonderful community! **(Jessica Saldana)**



Hey, guys! Welcome to Odyssey. I know how you may be feeling, nervous or excited, just praying to make it to the end? Ask me how I know: because I was you! Odyssey is nothing to be afraid of. There will seem like lots of work to do,

but with Emily, Char, Kevin, and the gang, you've got this! You can do it and when you do, you'll be proud of the person you have become. You'll love all the people you have met, and the fun family events help bring us all closer together. If you are shy, they will help you overcome that; you will be encouraged to use your voice.

I would like to say congratulations on getting into the program, don't give up, take it one day at a time, and remember your instructors are there to help and support you. Odyssey is a great opportunity and the year really goes fast, so enjoy the journey and good luck! **(Naquila Taylor)**



This FAMILY is for EVERYBODY! I call this a family and not a class because that is what you will become with your classmates. You will form a bond with some of them that will be unbreakable.

Upon walking into class the first day, you will feel like maybe you shouldn't be here. There will be people in the class from all walks of life, and therefore you SHOULD be there. You will find out in the duration of this class that you have much more in common with your classmates than you could ever realize, and that is how they will become your family. Remember that your family is much larger than just this class because alumni are here for you as well.

All of you are here because you wanted this, so I congratulate you. You have just chosen an Odyssey that will change your life. Now don't get it wrong, you will work for this wonderful journey, but it will be well worth it. There will never be a time that you can't ask for help, please remember that. Every professor that you have is there for YOU. Their goal is for you to complete this Odyssey.

(Mechele Williams)



ALUMNI CORNER

DON'T QUIT

BY JOE ROBINSON '04

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

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

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

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

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

When you feel as if you're not getting anything out of a particular subject, don't quit. When people tell you you are wasting your time, don't quit. When your car breaks down, and it's twenty below outside, and the only way to get here is on the city bus, don't quit. When your spouse is complaining that your five children are driving her crazy every Wednesday night, don't quit. When one of your classmates makes you feel stupid for voicing your opinion, don't quit. When your boyfriend or girlfriend accuses you of cheating on them because you had to turn your cell phone off during class, don't quit.

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

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



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



Joe Robinson with his family

WE ATE DOG FOOD

BY ALICE MCDANIEL '09

WRITTEN FOR KEVIN MULLEN'S
ODYSSEY ALUMNI COMPOSITION CLASS



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We ate dog food, but we were rich.

ODYSSEY POEM

BY ANTHONY JEFFERSON ‘17

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

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

Sentence by sentence, we forge a new tale.



SPECIAL ODYSSEY MOMENTS



Odyssey Project receives award at UW Chancellor Becky Blank's house; Teresa Tellez-Giron '04 receives 2014 YWCA Woman of Distinction Award; Stanley Sallay '07 and Tosumba Welch '13 meet *Just Mercy* author Bryan Stevenson; Corey Saffold '06 elected to UW Board of Regents; Class of 2014 students featured on Capital City Hues cover.



TV personality Tavis Smiley and scholar Cornel West taking Odyssey students out to dinner during their Poverty Tour; Senator Tammy Baldwin meets Brian Benford '07, Char Braxton '06, and Dominique Christian '09; scholar Henry Louis Gates with Kegan Carter '04 and Josephine Lorya '08; Yolanda King (daughter of the late Martin Luther King, Jr.) with Emily Auerbach, Juanita Wilson '07, Pamela Holmes '04, and Denise Maddox '04; author Jelissa Edwards '16 on cover of BRAVA Magazine.