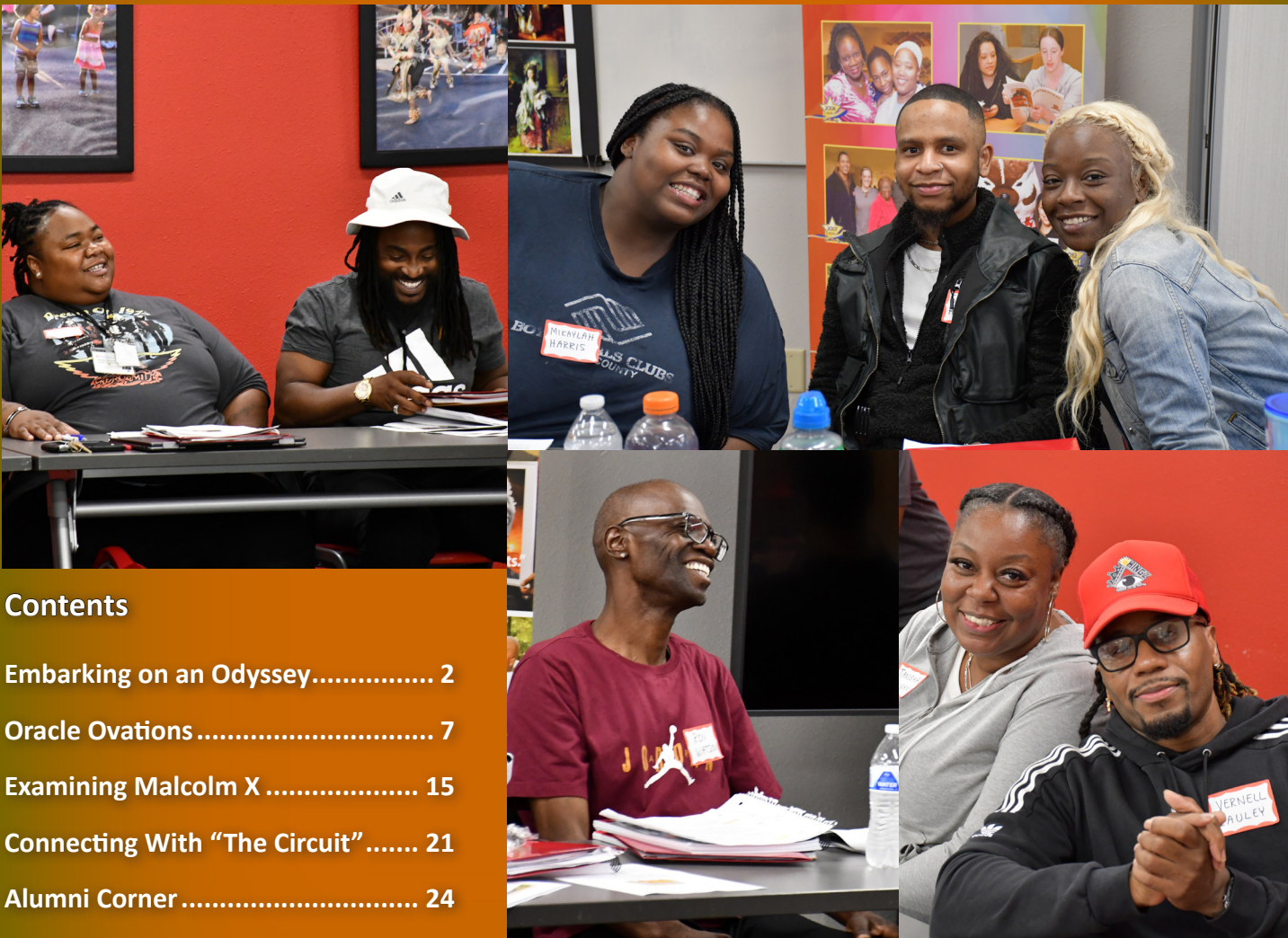


ODYSSEY ORACLE

EMBARKING ON AN ODYSSEY



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Emily Auerbach, Executive Director/Co-Founder
Emily Azad, Program Manager; Photographer
Sarah Lensmire, Assistant Program Manager; Photographer
Christina DeMars, Coordinator; Oracle Assistant
Gwendolyn Coale, Odyssey Assistant Coordinator; Oracle Assistant
Beth Auerbach, Oracle Designer

emily.auerbach@wisc.edu/608-712-6321

EMBARKING ON AN ODYSSEY

In their first homework assignment, Odyssey students looked up a definition of odyssey and commented on why the course is called that—and how it might be an odyssey for them.

odyssey: a long wandering marked by many changes in fortune; from an ancient Greek poem by Homer about the warrior Odysseus' adventure-filled journey home from Troy

I believe that this course is called the Odyssey Project because we are all going on a journey together and it could be lifelong. I know the class will be an Odyssey for me as I expect this class to be a journey and a big part of my life. **(Dontaeva Acklin)**

I think this course got its name from the word. This class is going to be a journey through time, emotions, interests, etc. Personally, I like this course already! It'll be an Odyssey for me because I'm going on my own personal journey of continuous growth, obviously in all aspects of life, being 30 years old. **(Carissa Andrews)**

Homecoming: this is an opportunity to return to myself and remember what I can do and who I am. So much of the odyssey that is life is remembering and forgetting, forgetting and remembering. A reductive way to describe intellect could just be applied remembering...weaving together all the accumulated experiences and tossing them out like a net to capture the glimmer of an idea. Through Odyssey, I'll recall gifts that are inborn and those that are born of experience. We'll speak to those that have passed without rites of blood and weave their stories into ours. Inevitably, we will return home with the riches of our experience and clean house to begin anew. **(Lucas Benford)**

Odysseus, my classmates, and I have endured changes of fortune. Probably misfortune is something that we experienced most of all. Then,



this opportunity presents itself and changes my fortune. I am overwhelmed with optimism about my life. I've never stayed down and out mentally when experiencing hardships my entire life. Like Odysseus, I continued to try and resemble resilience through my life's journey and, like Odysseus, I pray it leads me home. **(Jasmine Benson)**

I think this course is called Odyssey as everyone enrolled in this course is either on a journey to finding themselves or finding the courage to begin a new chapter in their lives to bettering their education. This class is an Odyssey for me as it's giving me all the fundamentals and tools to be able to further my education so that I can be a better mother for my children. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**

In my opinion, this program is referred to as the Odyssey Project because it represents an eventful journey that can be life-changing. Throughout the journey I believe I will learn a lot about myself just as Odysseus did. **(Mia Cannon)**

Odyssey means journey, so I believe the class is going to be a journey full of mental adventure. I love exploring knowledge. However, doing it in a social environment will be an interesting journey because it's out of my comfort zone. **(Vernell Cauley)**

I believe this course is called the Odyssey Project because it opens up doors to new/better beginnings/chapters with different levels/journeys on the way. This class may be an Odyssey for me in my healthcare career and business. **(Fataeshia Clark)**

I believe it is called the Odyssey because it is going to be a journey of many experiences. I understand that I don't know everything, and to have knowledge is to have power. It's hard to keep focused and maintain a sense of understanding. It will be a journey for me because I've always thought I wasn't enough and even with everything I have at hand, I always felt as if I was missing something. Here I have all the tools needed to be successful and understand anything that I want to accomplish I can. I need to not get stuck in the mindset of "I can't" and "I'm not enough" because the possibilities are endless for me; I just have to believe I can do it. **(Mekicia Davis)**

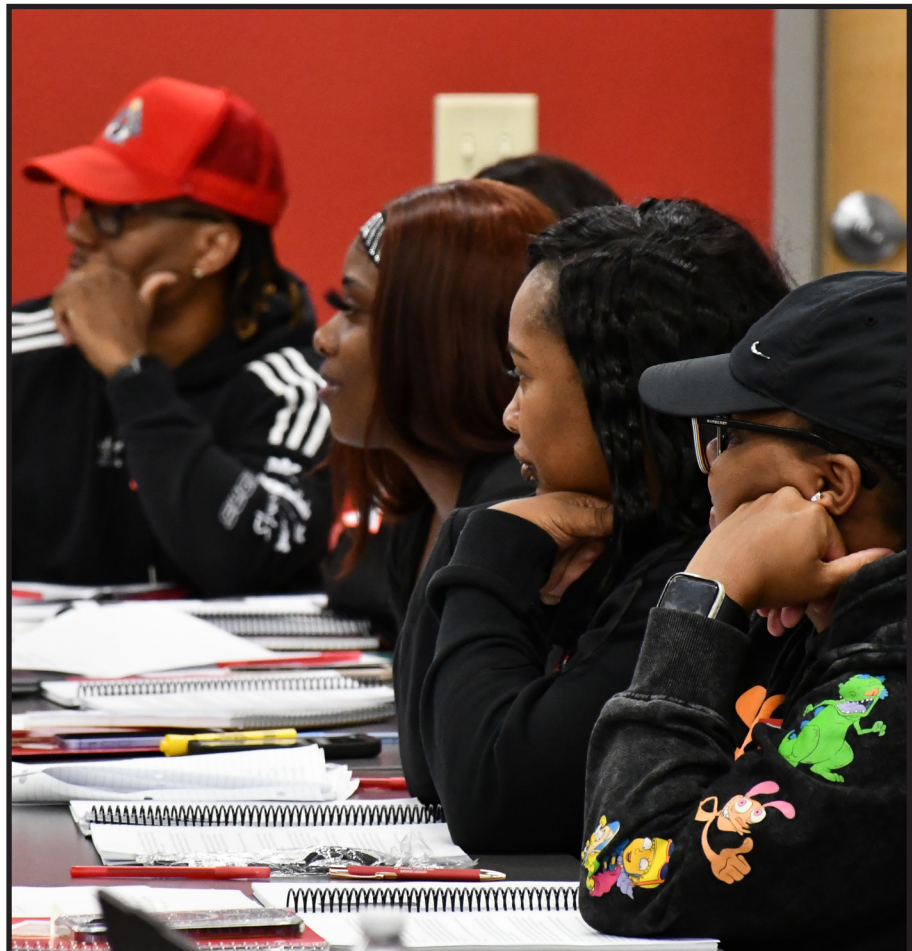
This is a journey and it can be eventful or adventurous. I think this is going to be a good experience for me, and I can't wait to learn new things and grow in areas I thought I couldn't. **(Andrea Evans)**

I think it's called the Odyssey Project because it provides a way to form a way together to help everyone to be able to follow their journey through life and provide many outlets to make that happen.

I believe this Odyssey for me will help me learn many things I may never have known. I love to write, and I believe this will guide me to learn more about literature and different cultures, to understand the history and present. Also with art and poetry, it will be so interesting to learn more of this. **(Aleesha Flowers)**

The poems we study are deep and extreme. The poems we read are made to give us an open mind. **(Andreya Gavin)**

There are several of us coming together from all over the world to get to the same place no matter how long it takes and we're all in this together. Sometimes it may seem long or challenging, but it will all be worth it in the end. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



I think it is called the Odyssey Project because people may be wandering in life, trying to figure out their career, their education, their personal life, their purpose, their right path. This class will hopefully lead them in the right direction, open their eyes up, and help them learn different views on life, and understand themselves and others more. **(Mikaylah Harris)**

I believe this program is called the Odyssey Project because it's been fortune to many people, but it's also breaking generational barriers.

It's offering families and individuals the resources and assistance to reach the next step.

After reading *The Odyssey* in high school, my takeaway was to be mindful and thoughtful throughout any experience because you never know the true wishes of life moments until they are gone. **(Synquar Harston)**

It's called that because this will most definitely be a journey for us all. I'm sure it won't be a "walk in the park." What's worth having, you have to work hard for, though. Every day won't be sunshine, but I



promise to make it through the rain. It's something I'm doing for myself and my kids. Through the good, the bad, and the ugly... I WILL FINISH! So this is my start to my Odyssey.

It's also called Odyssey because it's a journey filled with lots of opportunities and ways to reach our goal. **(Cierra Jackson)**

It's called the Odyssey Project because they are focusing on people that are facing different adversities, barriers, obstacles to find their own path to overcome and achieve success in their life.



During the voyage of the class, a group of elite professionals will work with you to blow up your potential and break your fears.

Odyssey is a space to dream, to use your imagination, to believe, to be self-confident. This is a project that changes life.

Twenty years later back to school, my mind is mixed with many concerns and fears, but at the same time I can feel an infinite hope through the darkness. I am like an innocent child without past and future and just enjoying the present. **(Blanca Laine)**

I'm also on this journey going to school to better myself. My journey is just beginning this discovery of college and what passions of learning I am wanting to fulfill, I guess. **(Rosanna Lopez)**

I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it's like an exploration. It's an opportunity, an adventure, a chance to uncover untapped potential within ourselves. **(Giana Mason)**

This is a great experience for the people who get into this program to go further in their education or for people who want a better life for themselves.

This class will help me get the degree that I want so badly but have been putting off because I feared trying something different. I'm glad my support system pushed me to go through with the program. **(Tanisha Milligan)**

I think this course is called the Odyssey Project because it is a unique journey with a multitude of learning experiences. This course gives me the opportunity to explore new visions, learn new concepts, and open new doors. **(Souleymane Nikiema)**

I think it's called the Odyssey Project because an odyssey is a form of a journey. For me, this program is going to be a journey of exploring out of my comfort zone and hopefully growing and learning how to complete my journey. **(Terance Nix)**

It's a journey for someone that is searching for a better opportunity for improving their life's journey for success and the opportunity to help other generations to come.

It would be life changing for me as I want to reach my dreams and goal in life so that I can help others by giving back to the community someday. **(Sally Phelps)**

I believe it is called the Odyssey Project because of "changes of fortune"! It changes people's lives for the better.

For me, Odyssey is the start of a new journey, building my own bridges to finally cross over to where I am meant to be in life. **(Isiah Pickett)**

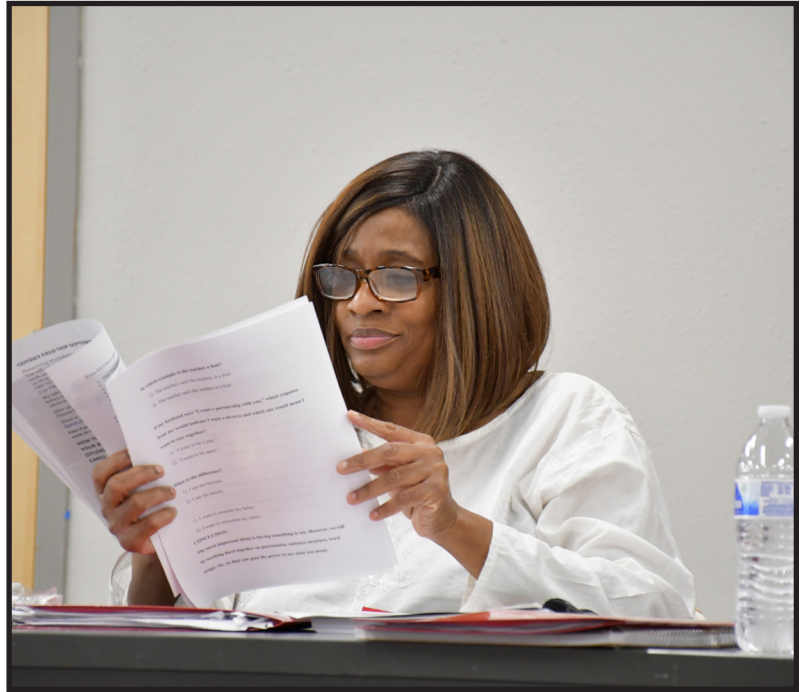
It won't be easy, but it will be worth it. Basically, it will be a hard, long, complicated journey, and we will not only learn about ourselves but each other and the world.

This class is for me because I love challenges. I truly believe anything I put my mind to I WILL accomplish. I know I will be pushed and I look forward to it. I know this class will do that for me: push me to be great. **(Rodney Poe, Jr.)**

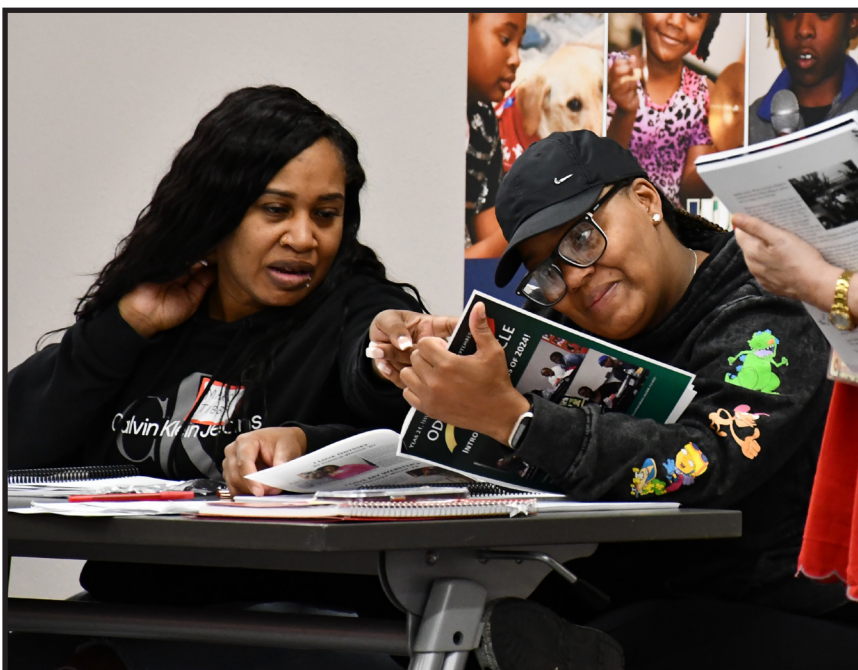


I feel that the class is called the Odyssey Project because it's like your life journey. Throughout your journey, you are going to experience obstacles that are going to help you learn how to achieve success from the chapters of your book (life journey). On your journey, you fulfill your dreams and goals. There's no end. I feel that the Odyssey Project is going to be a great help to me throughout my journey. I have always wanted to get myself an education. I have always been eager to learn. I have allowed things to get in my way, even though there's something inside of me that won't let me stop trying. I have so much trauma inside, at times it feels like something has me stuck and can't get my success out at times. My eagerness keeps me going. Odyssey feels like my journey is rising. I see completion. I feel I am on the road of success. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**

Odyssey is a journey and I have a long journey ahead of me that I'm willing to take, accomplish, and master. This project is about the journey we will take or have already taken. A journey of adventures, life has pushed me around and I'm ready to set the sail to reach the sea. My compass is set on being a lawyer. **(Marcy Tibbs)**



I believe it is called the Odyssey Project because this is a life journey. This may seem like a long journey for everyone. There will be lots of ups and downs. There will be lots of adventures and new things for a lot of us. This might be an Odyssey for me. I will myself have lots of ups and downs. I'm ready to learn new things about myself and the world, learn new learning styles, and just acknowledge new things on my path to success. **(Amanda Von Behren)**



It's a journey of eventful and adventurous things that we'll see and learn as we go through this program to better our lives and future. I hope to benefit from this program in so many ways. I hope to have more doors open for me and opportunities that are being presented. I really hope they make a huge impact on my life and future. **(Endia Walls)**

The project was named in my opinion for the reason being "knowledge." I get the opportunity to learn. Just to be in a classroom setting after so many years will be a personal journey of keeping it together! **(Ron Watson)**

ORACLE OVATIONS

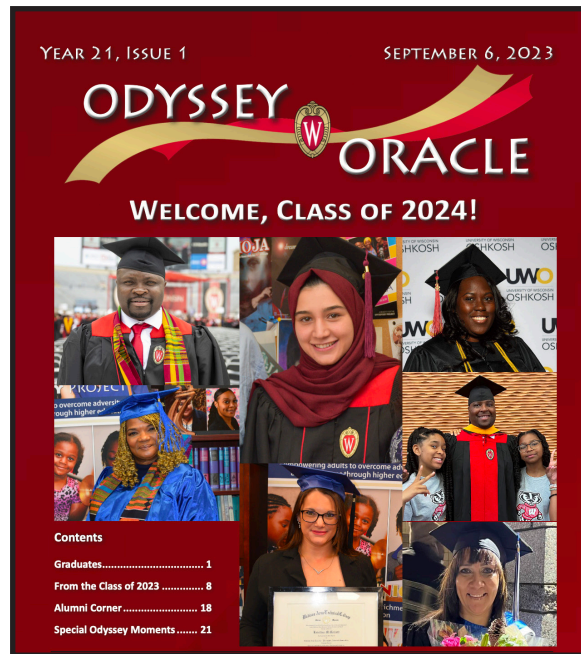
The first night of class, Class of 2024 students received a Welcome Oracle with letters from last year's class, pictures of graduates in caps and gowns, and samples of alumni writing.

As I read the Odyssey Oracle there were plenty of emotions running through me. To see prior students speak so highly of the Odyssey program is very inspiring and motivating. From reading this Oracle I learned that Emily does not play! I also learned that this will not be an easy journey, but it's worth the hard work. **(Dontaeva Acklin)**

Reading the Oracle surprisingly made me excited for this year long journey! I saw some familiar faces, which made me happy because people going through similar adversities were able to overcome. I noticed almost every alum made a reference to "NOT QUIT!"

I learned that the Odyssey Project really lives up to its name because everyone that participates goes on their own journey towards personal success, or what that means for them. Not only is this program enlightening, but the style of learning is what seems to grasp everyone's attention. **(Carissa Andrews)**

The Oracle's messages of vulnerability and persistence resonated with me the most. I thought a bit about how the walls we put up are, in fact, scars that have scabbed over, becoming something like bark. The challenge is to trust and believe that we can make ourselves anew and that pathways can be changed. I felt a sense of trust in the pages; a tender feeling that really moved me deeply. Tragically, I don't often have the opportunity to be



in spaces of great diversity where such a tender feeling - a hopeful feeling - prevails in the space. On the first day, I could see evidence that Odyssey is a loving incubator for intellectual growth.

One of the strongest parallels in "We Ate Dog Food," and "The Circuit" is a sense of education offering opportunities. Alice's father fed the family dog food as he was unable to read the label on the can. Obviously, this could have been avoided if he was literate. Panchito longed for the sense of place

and opportunity that school offered. Both families are very loving as evidenced by the authors' descriptions of family life in the stories, but this love is not enough to shield their children from the realities of poverty and the lack of education. In both stories, education is seen as an avenue to a better life.

I have a complex relationship with higher-education being a three-time college drop-out. There's a lot of guilt for not finishing and for not taking full advantage of the opportunities presented to me. This guilt does not serve my best interest; it only weighs me down. In trying to finish I always seemed to trip over myself: feelings of depression, a lack of community, my inner saboteur telling me it wasn't worth my time or I wasn't good enough. I'm now presented with an opportunity, at a stage in my life where I am the most seasoned and disciplined. I still struggle with knowing where to put my energy, but I'm excited to see the seeds I sow grow into wholesome fruits.

Much in the same way that the Oracle inspired me, I'd like to return that energy to the pages with my words. The Oracle helped remind me of the power in being vulnerable and sharing ourselves. I have several writing projects that I would like to complete, and the Odyssey program seems like an opportunity to jumpstart these endeavors. These are screenplays I started in my teens and twenties and a multitude of story fragments and ideas contained in my journals. I'd like to write to inspire, but selfishly and necessarily, I also want to write for myself and in celebration of my creativity. Art makers seem to create the most beautiful works when allowed to channel their individual essence into something profound and enduring. I'm learning to give myself permission to be essentially me, and Odyssey is catalyzing this process. I'm profoundly grateful. **(Lucas Benford)**

Reading former alumni stories in the Oracle encouraged me to further tell my truth while learning about myself in the process. I am immensely grateful and anxious to be vulnerable through my writings like those before me from Odyssey. I know that even through words sharing something like "We Ate Dog Food" isn't easy. Everyone from last year had a story of triumph to be there.

I want to write about my life and others; I want to show how our differences make us alike. Intersectionality will be my biggest hurdle. I am an African American woman from an impoverished background, overweight, and gay. I happen to live in Wisconsin, where all of these things make me different. I want to show my struggles and triumphs and my ongoing challenges.

Through my writings and learning as a student in the Odyssey program, I will show that we are all fighting something. Like William Blake said, we shouldn't be ashamed to be human and that looks different. It feels different but let's not have trauma Olympics or even only a trauma bond. Let's embrace, listen, and learn what the human race truly is: a bunch of people trying and hoping no one notices they don't have a clue about life either. **(Jasmine Benson)**

Reading the Oracle was inspiring. Honestly, it made me very emotional. I personally can relate to almost all of the comments being made about being a mother and tackling the struggle of working 10+ hour days and still coming home to cook, clean, and bathe my kids as well as myself. In reading the Oracle I did learn that the Odyssey program is not just a course to prepare you for other schooling. It is more of a family working together to help one another succeed in life. And this is what I am excited for the most.

Alice's "We Ate Dog Food" was funny yet intriguing and surreal. Her father saw corn-hash and only assumed it was for human consumption. But with more education he would've realized it was for a dog. This is a pure example that education is fundamental. This is why I am here. This is why I took this step. I want nothing more than to succeed in this program but also in life for my kids! My hope is that for the new Oracle I can inspire others with stories of my odyssey—the trials I encountered and how I persevered through them. I'm ready to tell my story as it can help others like these scholars' stories inspired me. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**



Alice McDaniel, Class of 2008

The biggest thing that stood out to me from last year's class is the way they speak about the transition of their mindset and the huge impact it had on their lives. Being the daughter of an alumna and a recent graduate, I find it immensely inspiring to hear from individuals that stood in the same shoes I am in now. I am also grateful enough to have lived through it watching the sacrifice my own mother (Michelle Bozeman '11) made as far as finishing Odyssey and then taking it a step further and receiving her bachelor's. I want to be that same inspiration to my daughter.



The relation I see between both “We Ate Dog Food” and “The Circuit” is how impactful and important in everyday life it is to be able to read, write, and thoroughly articulate yourself.

(Mia Cannon)

Reading the Oracle made me feel encouraged. The testimonies from previous graduates were well written and informative. It was great to see familiar faces from similar backgrounds achieve their goals. I also admired that everyone had something positive to say about Executive Director Emily Auerbach. Nothing like knowing you are in a program with someone who truly cares for the success of their students.

I’m looking forward to the nine months I will spend in this class. Writing was never my strong suit, but I believe I will learn everything I need to know to turn what was once a weakness to a strength. I’ve always wanted to write a book on my experiences of my life. With the help of Odyssey, soon I will be able to do so. **(Vernell Cauley)**

Reading the Oracle made me feel more comfortable in being in Odyssey. Everyone felt like they created a family outside of their own. They felt that Emily and the other professors were not only there to help with the schooling of Odyssey

but yet their personal life. Just to know you have people willing and able to help you succeed in life supporting you on the journey is an amazing feeling.

“We Ate Dog Food” reminded me of “The Circuit” when she stated her father only went to school on a regular basis only up to the third grade. He had to work in the fields to make ends meet much like Francisco. Alice’s parents couldn’t complete their education due to the personal obstacles they faced. That brings me to a personal connection on how I faced obstacles with my family as a child, having to drop out of school myself. But yet I was so determined for my education and a better life. I worked two to three jobs, bounced from three alternative schools, failing, and eventually came across MATC, where they helped me achieve my HSED! **(Fataeshia Clark)**

In the Oracle I saw lots of people giving their personal testimonies. I viewed people as being vulnerable for a greater cause and motivating the oncoming class to do the same. The stories I read made me become hopeful and appreciative of this opportunity I was granted. It gives me joy because we were handpicked! None of us were lucky—we were chosen. Throughout life we won’t be picked for everything, but in this time right now, we were. We all have a point to prove. **(Mekicia Davis)**

Everyone said not to give up, to always ask questions, and that Emily is a phone call away. And never give up but keep pushing. Reading the Oracle made me feel good and made me more excited about being in the Odyssey program. I want to see how much I grow and how much confidence I gain within myself. I've been homeless before, lost faith, wanted to give up, but I knew that I couldn't do that because I am a mother and my babies look up to me. Eventually I want to go to nursing school. I wondered how I was going to do the program, work full time, and be a full-time mother of five, but I know that I need this and I want it.

(Andrea Evans)

Reading the alumni Oracle made me feel I made a smart decision and am extremely grateful to be chosen to start a journey that I am ready for! The readings made me feel safe and comfortable, and I believe everyone mentioned that we have support through this all!

Some sentences that jumped out at me were to always show up to class, always ask for help if I need help with anything, go to tutoring, and keep up with homework. **(Aleesha Flowers)**

I felt like I wanted to cry reading it because a lot of it I needed to hear or I could relate to. I liked how everyone was honest and welcoming. Mya's comment stood out to me most: "what I didn't expect is that my only competition in this class would be me so get ready for you versus you every week." The "We Ate Dog Food" story relates to "The Circuit" because it shows how usually back then men couldn't go to school because they would have to work; they couldn't afford to learn. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



Reading the Oracle make me excited, nervous, eager. I am ready to learn lots of new things, but I am nervous that I might not get things and want to give up. I'm gonna push myself to do the best that I can.

I have learned that it very important to not miss class and not give up. If I need help, reach out and Emily will be a great resource. I will learn a lot. I will make some great relationships, and I am looking forward to doing so.

(Mikaylah Harris)

I loved reading everyone's personal battles and testimonies. I've always loved being able to understand someone's reasonings for doing something.

One of my favorite quotes from this past Oracle is from Anthony Jefferson's poem: "Odyssey is the pencil of life with which we can erase past regrets and rewrite our future." It reminds me that I can overcome any old choice or mistake and still be met with Greatness because I deserve it.

I hope throughout this journey I feel comfortable enough to share my personal life stories and experiences with you guys. **(Synquar Harston)**

I love how all the graduates worked hard to make us feel comfortable, relaxed, and welcomed. I loved the way they all encouraged us to keep going no matter what and never be afraid to ask for help. They did a wonderful job letting us know how helpful and supportive staff can be as long as we ask for help.

Reading the Oracle really lets me know how lucky I am to have been chosen to participate in Odyssey. For next year I will focus on being more like the people who aren't afraid, shy, or nervous and just the people who are just overly excited to finally be given a chance.

The two stories (“We Ate Dog Food” and “The Circuit”) relate in many ways, but to save time I’ll just name a few. In both stories the families were very poor and didn’t live healthy lives. Also, it seems like in both stories the mothers were more educated than the fathers. Lastly, even though the families were poor, they worked hard anyway. **(Cierra Jackson)**

Reading the Oracle made me feel more comfortable with myself. Every story inspires me to keep continuing to strive for my dreams and not give up. All the stories are touching and powerful; however, two of them caught my attention. One is the story of Aida Inuca, a native woman from my country (Ecuador). Same as Aida, I am finding it challenging with my third language, which is English, but her powerful story inspires me to not fall behind and to overcome any obstacles. The other story is by Tiara Smith. It reminds me of that moment of my past life when I did not have a real direction on where I wanted my life to go. However, her determination to change her life was always present. This is the Odyssey Project, a powerful weapon that changes lives. It does not look at your social status, race, or age. They give us the same tools and depend on us to use those tools and make it happen. **(Blanca Laine)**

The Oracle made me cry—that’s what it made me feel. The sentence that jumped out on me was by Tiara Smith that I was one of 30 students to be accepted into the Odyssey program. Yes, reading Alice’s “We Ate Dog Food” and “The Circuit” did remind me of my own life—struggles in the family and also in myself. Reading this Odyssey Oracle, I very much can relate with the comments in the letters from last year’s class, liking their feelings and recommendations. I now know that I will face some difficulties too. I know my ideas will come up eventually. I am just wondering which ones to write about to share in the Oracle and in what order. **(Rosanna Lopez)**

I really enjoyed reading the letter by Kiana Sims. Everything was just very poignant and beautifully put. I guess when I think about where I want to take myself in regards to my education down the road, it is still blurry. I have interests in poetry, speaking, writing, but I am inspired and honestly scared at the same time.

Reading The Oracle was enjoyable and gave me faith because I deal with an anxiety disorder that can steal a lot of the present for me. So, as much as my anxiety wants to have it all figured out, based on the letters from last year’s class, their personal calling seemed to find them in time. **(Giana Mason)**

Reading this made me feel like I’m not the only one who was feeling scared or wondering how I am supposed to take this class on Wednesday after working eight hours, then going home to get the kids settled. I can do it just like they did. A sentence that stuck out to me is “Trust the process. You’ve gotten yourself into a class that wants to see you successful, a staff that will do anything in their power so that you can be successful.”

“We Ate Dog Food” reminds me of “The Circuit” in the way of people not being able to get the proper education that we are so fortunate to have. If Alice’s dad was able to read, then he would’ve known what he was feeding his children.



I learned that the Odyssey Project is a great opportunity for me and my fellow classmates. If we keep a positive attitude and ask for help when needed and stay up on our homework, there is no way that we can't make it through this class. I want to write a story of how I felt getting the call I was accepted, to showing up the first day of class, to what will happen in the end with me graduating and continuing my education and being a better me for myself and my kids. **(Tanisha Milligan)**

The Odyssey Project is a journey filled with great people, grace, compassion, respect, and knowledge. Without a doubt, I deeply believe that this course will lead to a new me with a fresh start if I put in my part of work with discipline and consistency. Emily and the entire Odyssey Project family are good and trustworthy people. I can feel that they speak from their hearts; I can feel the humanity in them when we are interacting. Yes! It's true, there is still hope and goodness in this world! Thank you! **(Souleymane Nikiema)**

Reading this made me feel a lot better and more confident to be in this Odyssey Program. "We Ate Dog Food" reminds me of my life of the mistake of ignorance. I also related to the comment "Trust the Process." It's something I live by. I learned that this is a program that is perfect for me to grow out of my shell and advance in life. The kind of story I would tell is one of struggle, fear, and bravery. I hope my story will make the next class feel just how the last class made me feel. **(Terance Nix)**

Reading the articles from the Oracle is very encouraging, and I was inspired to hear all the great success and the impact that the program has had.

Everyone comes from different background but we are seeking the same opportunity to better our life's journey. The Odyssey Project is the place of opportunity for people with hope where they feel is now possible to have a life changing journey. **(Sally Phelps)**

In Tameia Allen's letter, she stated you are going to have to put in the work. This stood out to me because this is something I have always had to do. Joe Robinson's "Don't Quit" was powerful to me because quitting has never really been an option for me.

It was very motivating and inspiring in the Oracle to see so many walks of life complete the Odyssey Project. It is even more powerful to see all the people that went on to further their education.

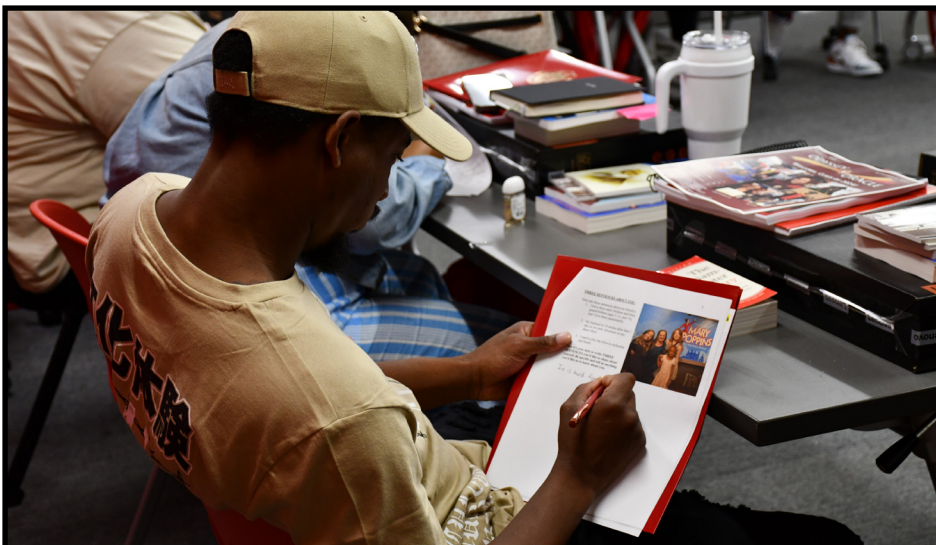
Just because something is challenging doesn't mean give up. Take it seriously and it will reward you. This project will only work for you if you put work into this project. What you put in is what you get out.

I would love to write stories about my life from the age of 5-20. I have been affected and impacted in such a way that it changed me, some for the good

and some for the worse. I would like to tell people my life and the great obstacles I have overcome. Maybe it will reach the right people and inspire them to keep going.

There should be an Odyssey Project everywhere. The lifestyle for minorities would be better in communities if we give people the resources, tools, and knowledge to be better and do better.

(Isiah Pickett)



Alice's "We Ate Dog Food" related to "The Circuit" because of her dad's story of not being able to get an education because of having to work, being pulled out of school so he could help his family survive. If he had known how to read, they would've never eaten dog food.

From reading some of their letter, I see we all have a lot in common and that's having to push through the struggles and strive to better ourselves, whether it's for our kids, family, or for ourselves. Just reading how excited they are for us and future students gives me all of the confidence that I can and I WILL persevere. As long as I do that, I will succeed.

I look forward to sharing my story of being a big football star to being a troublemaker in the system's eyes. All of my mistakes I made when I was younger are still lingering on to me. But I refuse to give up for my kids and myself.

(Rodney Poe Jr.)

After reading the Oracle, I am grateful for all of the readings the student shared. I was inspired by all of their stories. When I feel tired or overwhelmed from all of the things that a person could experience throughout a day, it has given me an extra push. I am so amazed with all of the success that Odyssey has provided to all of the alumni in the Oracles. I truly want to be part of the family. I feel more confidence in myself. I am going to work extra hard and do the footwork to succeed. It's an honor to be part of the Odyssey family, and I will take full advantage of this amazing opportunity given. Reading the Oracles helped me feel motivated.

What jumped out to me after reading was how Odyssey built a supporting environment that's encouraging others to succeed; it's more than an educational program because their supporting system is a family lifeline. That was so encouraging to help me put more emphasis on working extra hard.

Also, I read about trying not to miss class or miss assignments because missing

something means missing a lot. I truly can relate to that advice.

I have come to believe that I am sitting in the seat because it was meant to be. I feel it's my time to appreciate this opportunity.

What jumped out at me were Joe Robinson's "Don't Quit," Curtrice Foster's "The world is about to open up for you in magnificent ways," and Fredy Carcano's "Odyssey will show you how to be a successful person."

Alice's "We Ate Dog Food" reminds me of a story that I could relate to my own life. Growing up I had four other siblings. I was next to the oldest brother, and I was the oldest sister. I remember picking out a cookbook from the school library. I was about seven years old, and my siblings and I were very hungry. We were poor, and I tried to make sugar cookies. I messed up the cookies when I was reading the recipe. It said to put in a pinch of salt. After the cookies were done, all of the sugar cookies tasted like salt cookies. My sisters and I couldn't stand to taste the cookies, but my little brother ate them all. He said they were good. He was the hungriest. I couldn't measure correctly.

I related to the comments in the letters from last year's class because I was feeling afraid. I feel like when things get overwhelming, I easily quit. It's



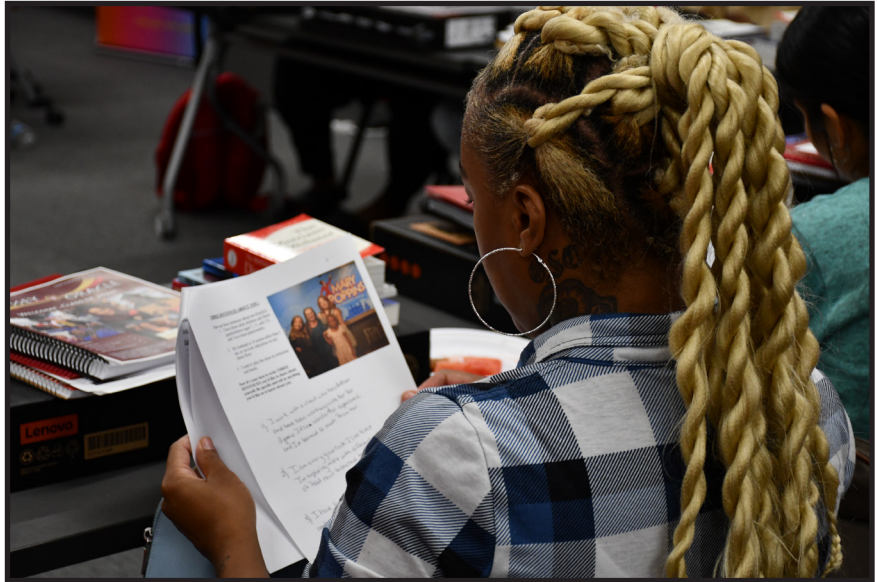
hard for me to complete things in a timely matter because of low self-esteem. I've learned that I truly need to push myself. I also learned that Odyssey built bonds that will last a lifetime, meaning the only way of failure is that you didn't try.

I am going to take the advice that's given from all of the alumni seriously. I know that any two days are not the same, and life is not perfect. Instead of feeling bad for not completing an assignment on time, I am going to pat myself on the shoulder and believe in myself. I thank you all for the push. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**

When reading the Odyssey Oracle, I felt if others can do this so can I. "I'm on my way to a better me" is all I can think of. Reading letters from last year's students made me question if I'm in the right place in my life to complete the Odyssey Project. But oh when I started reading the Alumni Corner and every sentence was "Don't Quit," it was then I knew that I was in the right place at the correct time in my life. I'm not a quitter is what I kept telling myself. That was the piece of confirmation I needed.

When I got to Alice's story "We Ate Dog Food," it reminded me of the lack of education that my grandmother had. But to me she is still an uneducated scholar similar to Alice's mom. I have had my share of many thoughts and fears wanting to further my education, but reading Kaitlin Birdsall's letter I saw she quoted Athena Singh: "Never trust your fears, they don't know your strength." That stood out to me because I always trusted my fears, but now I won't even bother with them. When reading the letters from other students, I learned that you're only successful if you show up and make a difference. When it's time to write my story next year, I will talk about Fear, Trust, and Gratitude. **(Marcy Tibbs)**

There are many things that jump out at me in the Oracle. Being very lucky to have been chosen to



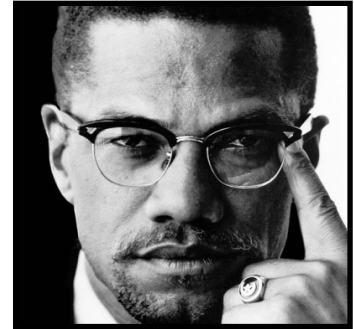
be a part of this family is the biggest! Knowing that I have teachers that actually care just as much about me graduating says a lot. In my last college experience, it felt like I was the only person that cared if I survived the class. Reading about how people juggled work, family, and school lets me know that the end goal is reachable. Seeing all of the graduating students of so many different races and ages makes you feel more confident.

Alice's story kind of reminds me of my own life. Being a single parent the last couple years has made me look at the bigger picture of stuff. Even though there is a list of things my kids could use to be happier and more stable, I let them know all the time that the sky is the limit. Whatever you put your mind to you can do! I don't like the word "can't" either. I can remember growing up and my mom telling me that we don't use that word. I teach them all the time that material things are that important. Finding financial stability will come 10x greater if you have an education. Book smarts and street smarts are very important. Everything I lack in material stuff my kids make that up. I feel like the richest person in the world when I know my kids are happy and content. **(Amanda Von Behren)**

This passage made me feel focused and determined and also that I'm not the only that has times where things don't work in my favor. I should never give up but keep trying. **(Endia Walls)**

EXAMINING MALCOLM X

I saw that the best thing I could do was get hold of a dictionary. . . . Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. . . . I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. —Malcolm X, from “Saved” chapter about his “homemade education,” The Autobiography of Malcolm X



I interpreted “Homemade Education” as self-teaching. I have had to do this my entire life being a black woman, digging deeper than what is told in school, unfiltered. I absolutely loved this piece, as I could relate to it so well. I’ve always wanted to know more about my people, and I knew this would take for me to self-teach and hook up some homemade education. **(Dontaeva Acklin)**



A homemade education is one that didn’t come from school. I believe that Malcolm meant all of his teachings were life taught or life lessons. His lack of a word base and choice to pick up a dictionary and self-teach reflects this.

I personally am a fan of Malcolm X and his teachings, so I liked the reading. Inspiring is a word that I would use to describe this piece and his life. To see trials, tribulations, and the overcoming really shows a person how they can do anything as long as they want it! **(Carissa Andrews)**



Malcolm X’s “homemade education” is an education that one cobbles together from non-traditional sources. Malcolm’s homemade education was one that he found in prison. Irritated by his ignorance, he decided to access the vast collection of books available in prison and repair the holes in his knowledge. His goal was to be able to communicate as effectively as a writer as he was able to as an orator.

The largest and happiest part of my education

is a “homemade education.” My self-service education was borne out of being a 90s latch key kid left to my own devices while my mom waited tables. In that era of my life, I would read a ton of fiction and nonfiction - whatever had happened to come into my home from Saint Vincent de Paul or the library. During that time in my life, I tried to teach myself multiple languages; read tons of poetry and classic literature; found that I could lose myself for hours and hours in the comfort of the page. I hope to access that part of myself while engaging in this program. I’ve often found that, like Malcolm, my edification is a solitary act. My hope is to be able to have engaging and productive discourse in the Odyssey community. **(Lucas Benford)**



Deafness, dumbness, and blindness, and insensitivity of the afflictions of the black race in America. He means it wasn’t from a university, ivy league, or otherwise. Malcolm X was and is the definition of growth. By making the best out of a bad situation, Malcolm X made his own curriculum. He had a degree from the school of hard knocks. Now he wanted a master’s from books and a formal education. He started from basic penmanship, courses, and self-made exercises to help with punctuation and articulation. He found a LOVE of reading again that he had once as a youth and sought education to become who he wanted to be going forward. Education is freedom, and it’s escaping your situation and propelling you to another. Malcolm X shows that through reading you can rebuild your entire world and become part of the world you thought you could never be a part of. **(Jasmine Benson)**



Malcolm X's "Homemade Education" to me means that we cannot only learn in school and from the books and lectures given

to us there. We learn and educate ourselves with the things we do in everyday life. I believe that Malcolm X's meaning of this autobiography is that he utilized his experiences and tribulations within the prison system as a young child to learn. The phrase "Homemade Education" is literally him stating that he made up a way to get his own education.

(Danika Bethel-Johnson)



The phrase that stood out to me the most is, "My reading of books, months passed without me even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been truly free in my life." To be residing in prison and have the will power

to not only teach yourself to read and understand but to take it a step further and basically memorize the dictionary makes me relate to myself in a small aspect. My eagerness to learn more about how to best articulate myself and expand my vocabulary is exactly what I stated in the first Oracle. I can relate to Malcolm as far as wanting to get my point across in a way that best represents me. **(Mia Cannon)**



I believe Malcolm X's "Homemade Education" describes what I would call "in-the-box thinking." Sometimes society will tell us what and how we should think without giving us an opportunity to think for ourselves. I like how at

the beginning of the chapter he talks about how his inability to read and understand made him insecure. However, instead of allowing that to discourage him, he quickly discovered the benefits of self-education and forming an "out-of-the-box" way of thinking. **(Vernell Cauley)**



Malcolm didn't get as much education being that he barely made it out of the eighth grade. He turned to the streets, which landed him in prison, where he began his journey of a homemade education. In prison, Malcolm wrote letters,

but because he wasn't educated enough to read, understand, or express, it frustrated him, so he took it upon himself to teach himself by re-writing/copying the dictionary onto his tablet and reading books from the prison library. And I personally felt like he did what he had to do for himself. He was motivated/driven to learn and understand.

(Fataesha Clark)



I believe when Malcolm X said "Homemade Education" he meant the ability to find joy in gaining knowledge in your own way. There was nobody there making him read or learn the things he was learning. It was through experience

that he gained knowledge. He went to jail and was provided the opportunity to "rehabilitate" himself; there are many ways he could have done that, but by reading he gained a different understanding and appreciation for it. These were things he wasn't being taught in school. Even if he was given the chance, he most likely wouldn't be as focused or appreciative of the knowledge he was gaining. He was eager to learn; no teacher forced him to take in this information. This was all through his own

doing. When comparing Malcolm to any other civil rights activist or person of power, he reeks of confidence and knowledge. Comparing him to somebody who went to college would be comical. I feel Malcolm X would still come out on top or above. **(Mekicia Davis)**



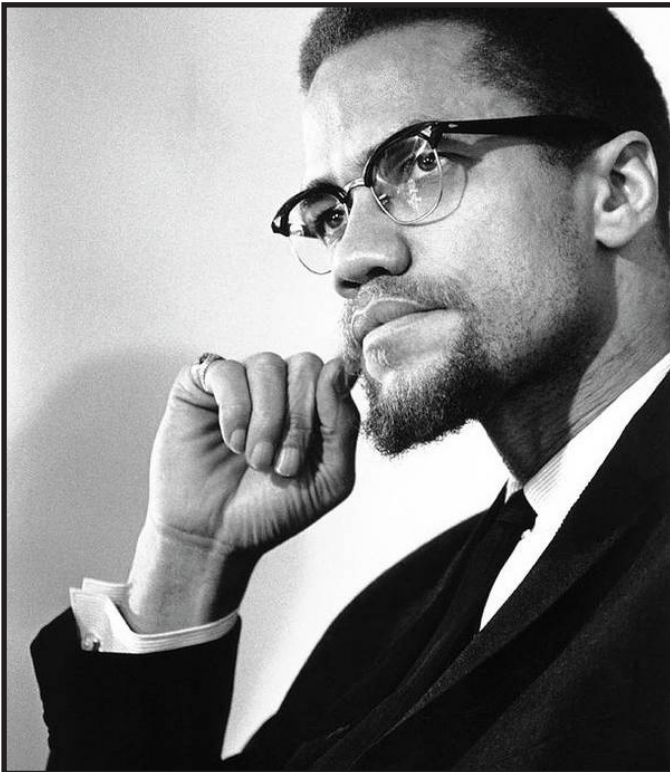
Malcolm came to learn more and more by teaching himself. He taught himself how to read and write by being in prison. He copied the dictionary, page by page, and really did not know how to pronounce the words. I thought that was smart to

self-educate. I don't think I would have been able to do that, especially not knowing the words or if I am saying them right. **(Andrea Evans)**



What Malcolm X meant by "homemade education" was that he was teaching himself by all the books and the dictionary. He broadened his word base and vocabulary. His reading came before anything. He may have not

been as knowledgeable if it wasn't for his time in prison. So "homemade education" is all the books



(ingredients) he taught and learned himself without going to college.

This piece is interesting, knowledgeable, and relatable. He wanted to learn about black history and the minority oppression and to give a voice for the black people. He got his inspiration for books and how you gain so much from reading. We are our own best teacher! **(Aleesha Flowers)**



Malcolm X had educated himself in his own way. He made it possible to get a lot of studying done by choosing to be alone. He created his own personal way of study. My response is of how black men and women had to learn in alternative

ways, just like Malcolm X. Homemade education, to Malcolm, was just as good as going to college because you can work on your own time. I believe isolation is necessary to focus because that way you understand your studies better. **(Andreya Gavins)**



When Malcolm talks about a "homemade education," I believe he's talking about the fact that everything he knows is self-taught or things he learned outside of an actual college or educational institute. I believe he did a good job on his autobiography, but you could tell by the way he talked that this is the beginning. I love how [he said] history had been "whitened"; that was very true for me. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



To me, "homemade education" means how he didn't really have the proper education and he had to teach himself how to write properly. He read and studied as much as he could in prison to learn new words and become more educated.

I agree with "homemade education." I feel after you're not in school anymore, no one really teaches you anything. It's up to you to self-educate, and by doing that he changed his whole life. Knowledge is a very powerful thing. **(Mikaylah Harris)**



I think he means taking the resources you're given and making something great out of them. He was in prison and taught himself how to read and write so he can ultimately write letters to Mr. Muhammad. But while learning he was able to fall in love with Black History as a whole and the thought of philosophy. It's amazing to know he taught himself all that while in prison, and I believe that's what he meant by "homemade education." I think his piece is powerful to me because it's demonstrating where you could start and end. With self-control and determination, you can accomplish anything. **(Synquar Harston)**



"Homemade Education" means he was self-learning and educating himself by reading words from the dictionary and learning and studying the meaning of the words. Then he started to read other books to expand his knowledge.

Although he was in prison, he didn't let that stop him from wanting to seek a better life. So, by reading and educating himself, his knowledge began to grow even more. The more you read, the more you learn. Being in prison somewhat was

good for him as he takes that opportunity to focus. He learns to want a better understanding and to gain knowledge rather than to feel defeated in life by being in prison. **(Sally Phelps)**



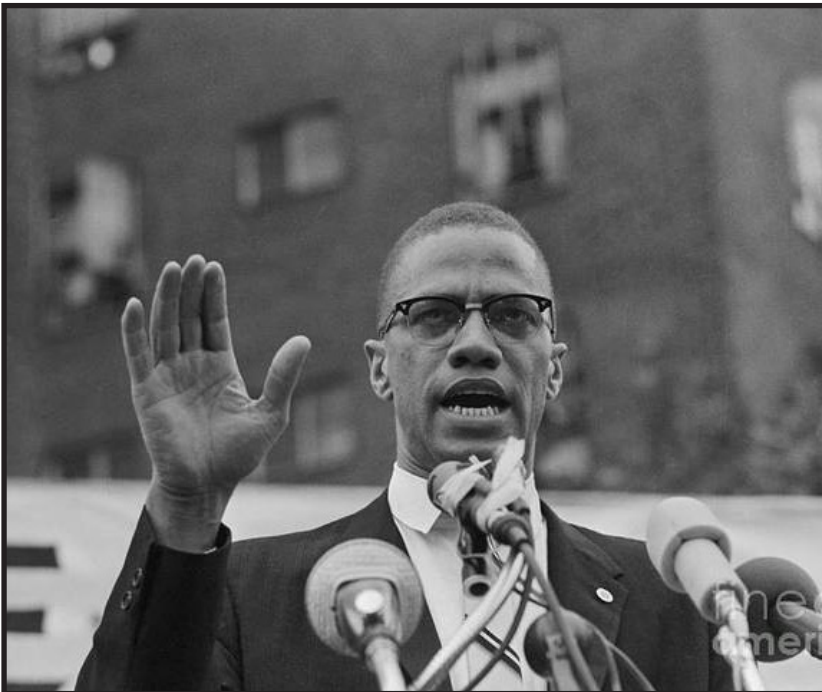
It simply explains how he was self-taught. Everything "important" he learned and taught himself in prison. After giving himself knowledge, he came to see that only what they wanted you to know could be found in easily accessible books. There wasn't much in books back then about "Black History." This made him want to learn more. I imagine myself being the same way. How could you not want to learn/know more about who you are and where you come from? I'm very thankful for historical people like him and don't know where black Americans would be now had it not been for people like him. **(Cierra Jackson)**



I believe Malcolm X's "Homemade Education" means the way that somebody can nourish knowledge by creating their own method of learning without need to follow the current system of education.

Not everything that you learn comes from school;

most comes from home. I grew up in a culture with a different language and traditions, and I remember how important it was to my parents to transmit their knowledge to me. My parents realized as well that if I want to succeed in this society, I have to immerse myself in the new culture. My best start was learning a new language. I was not a good reader or the best writer, but every day was a new opportunity to improve myself. **(Blanca Laine)**



Malcolm X's "homemade education" was his time in prison. He found books and started to educate himself. **(Rosanna Lopez)**



Malcolm X is his own educator. When asked what he earned his degree in, his response was, “books.” He felt prison allowed him to be truly free, and he used that time to free his mind by copying the dictionary in a tablet from beginning to end. From then on, he found any material that he thought would empower the black man, and he would just educate himself.

I was moved by this piece. I truly learned things, not just about Malcolm X, but I learned about the white man’s narrative and imprint. **(Giana Mason)**



In his autobiography, the phrase “homemade education” means teaching yourself the skills such as reading and writing to make it in life. He taught himself how to read and write just by copying the dictionary and that helped him to start reading. You wouldn’t have

known that he taught himself in prison instead of him being in a school for years. **(Tanisha Milligan)**



He realized the power of reading and writing, then he worked diligently to educate himself. He freed his mind by reading the right books.

Every growth begins with a click, a lack, or a need for something. A firm decision along with discipline can lead to success. Unlike ignorance, knowledge brings freedom, inner peace, tolerance, love, etc. **(Souleymane Nikiema)**



I think by “homemade education,” he was talking about teaching yourself with what you have at hand. **(Terance Nix)**



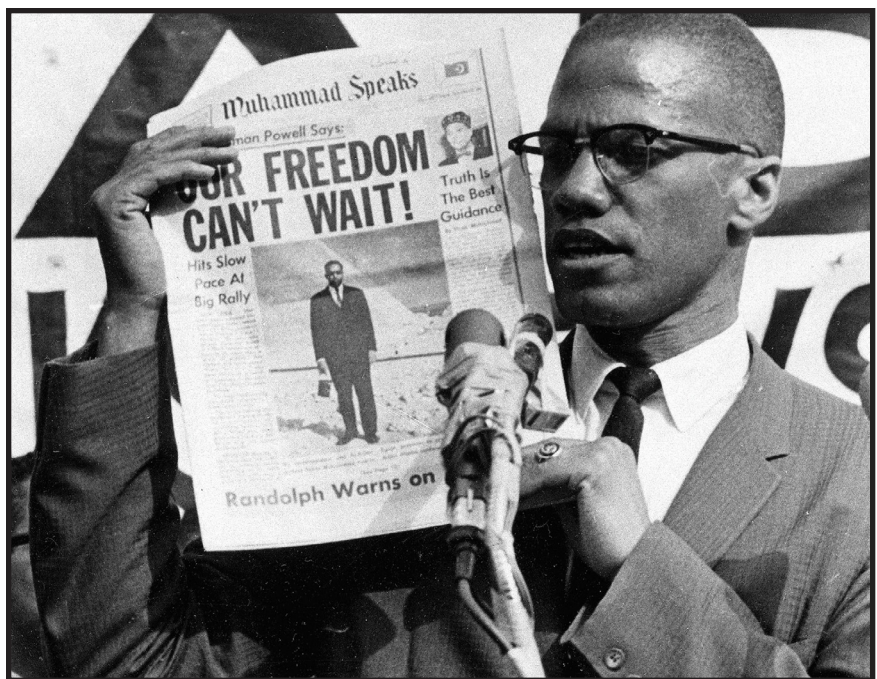
Prison is where he became knowledgeable of his own ignorance. Malcolm taught himself; prison forced him to become the best version of him. Malcolm’s education before then was not compared to him while in prison. In prison he was reading and reading over and over again, with no distractions from the outside world or college environment.

I feel like it was super impactful because a lot of the philosophy and books changed his life in the way it did. I want to get there myself. It is inspiring that in a down point in his life, he turned it into power and knowledge of self. **(Isiah Pickett)**



I think he means that education is all over the place, and you don’t need to go to college to get an education. There are resources all over the place; you just have to seek them. Never settle with just what they are teaching you in

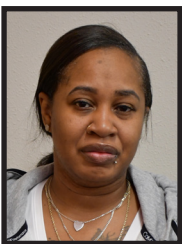
school. Be a sponge and stay curious. The more you are willing to teach yourself and also learn from others, there isn’t anything you can’t accomplish. **(Rodney Poe Jr.)**





I feel that the phrase “homemade education” comes from self-taught. Malcolm X, who only had an eighth grade education and came from hustling from the streets with a vocabulary of using slang, educated himself while in prison.

After stumbling when starting to write his letters, he would get frustrated when he couldn’t express what he wanted to convey, especially to Mr. Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X had envied Bimbi for his stock of knowledge back in Charlestown Prison. Malcolm X tries reading books, but after a few sentences the words weren’t making sense. It was like he was reading Chinese. Following that, Malcolm X went to Norfolk Prison Colony, still going through only book-reading motions. When he discovered a dictionary, it was the best thing he had done to study and learn words and improve his penmanship. He was proud to have written words that he never knew were in the world. He started to remember what some of the words meant; he was so fascinated that he went on copying the dictionary where he learned of people and places and events from history. He realized that the dictionary is like a miniature encyclopedia. He guessed that during the rest of his prison sentence he wrote about a million words. His impression is due entirely to his prison studies. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



When reading Malcolm X’s “Homemade Education” autobiography, I can only assume that he is telling the world that he taught himself how to read and write while in prison, making his learning situation more personal to himself and others.

Malcolm didn’t have an education beyond the eighth grade. So, he taught himself while struggling to read, pronounce, and copy page by page, word for word from the dictionary. He must have written a million words by the time he left prison.

Homemade education to me means self-taught. While reading this article I thought of many

conversations my mother and I would have about words she understood but I couldn’t understand, and I too have struggled with not knowing. **(Marcy Tibbs)**



I believe “Homemade Education” means educating yourself through books and reading lots of information and learning what you feel is important to you. It says how he was an articulate hustler but didn’t have much education. More than likely

the way he was raised made him become a hustler and have a lot of “street education.” It seems like he made a bad situation into a good one. He was in prison and spent his time educating himself with reading and trying to understand information that at one point was totally not known to him. Taking time to read the dictionary and learn new words, learning how to write, and not having much knowledge of that had to be hard. **(Amanda Von Behren)**



Reading is very fundamental. Malcolm had less than an eighth-grade education, but when incarcerated he taught himself how to read and write to where he could better understand from his own perspective. He started to learn more upon discovering the dictionary. And from then on he was able to comprehend and understand books more and gain self-knowledge, which, in my opinion, is “homemade education.” **(Endia Walls)**



What I take as the meaning of “homemade education” is that Malcolm was self-taught. He thought he was smart given the fact that he was able to hold people’s attention in the world of negativity. However, when he went to prison, he took the opportunity to better himself by opening the dictionary. He started to learn words and their meaning, with no teachers to assist him. He had no formal school after the eighth grade. Malcolm X became a popular figure in history with his militant attitudes. **(Ron Watson)**

CONNECTING WITH “THE CIRCUIT”

That day I could hardly wait to get home to tell Papa and Mama the great news . . . but when I opened the door to our shack, I saw that everything we owned was neatly packed in cardboard boxes. —from “The Circuit” by Francisco Jimenez



I felt this story about society and the same cycle reoccurring relates to the work I do with individuals who go through the same tough pattern over and over again. **(Dontaeva Acklin)**



I can relate to having lots of siblings but also having a mother that worked hard to make a way. What is most inspiring is Francisco not allowing his hardships growing up define his future. I hope to apply this to my own life. **(Mia Cannon)**



I can relate to the cycle repeating itself. I have an alcoholic mother who continuously made the same choices, which led to the same results. The hope and desperation for change is also another feeling I can relate to. **(Carissa Andrews)**



I can relate to the struggle the writer was faced with growing up in poverty. As he has to skip school to “hustle” to pick grapes. I used to do so to sell candy or pump gas for money to get by. **(Vernell Cauley)**



I moved a fair amount in my childhood and oftentimes feel, in any of my living situations, that I have one foot out the door. Not having a real sense of place and home is a terrible sensation; there’s this feeling that you don’t belong or there isn’t space for you in the world. **(Lucas Benford)**



I can personally relate to Francisco when it came to not feeling welcomed/comfortable in school/ classes. My race was not valued because people felt that I was different from them. **(Fataeshia Clark)**



I can relate to moving. Before I was 12 years old, I went to nine schools in two different cities. When you’re a child you don’t have a choice but just go with what the adults in your life tell you to do. You learn early to hide your emotions about things like that, but it hurts just the same. **(Jasmine Benson)**

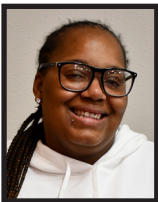


I can relate to having to work for everything I do. I didn’t always have the fanciest things and sacrificed a meal for my younger sibling. But I learned these lessons at a young age, which makes me a strong woman now. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**





I think I relate to the story because I had a brother who was deemed “bad.” He was a kid who made it hard for anybody he came into contact with, and basically his personality was “IEP” material. When we would start going to schools, I would be so excited and eager to make friends but also scared to build a connection because almost always my brother would be getting kicked out of school and programs, resulting in us needing to move into new school districts/ houses. It affected me because I was robbed of the opportunity to be social and really have friends, let alone anything else. **(Mekicia Davis)**



I can relate to the story because at one point of time in my life I was homeless with my kids. I only had four at the time, but we moved around a lot. We sometimes slept in cars at a hospital, but I always kept my faith and knew things were going to work out for the best. **(Andrea Evans)**



I can relate in the way that when I was younger, my parents moved all the time as well. I had to go to a new school, which seemed like every couple of years, from elementary through middle school. I was also nervous and scared to be a new classmate and have to make new friends. Change can be uncomfortable at first. I can also relate with how he was called names like wetback and chili stomper because I was called names like half-breed or yellow girl. Kids can be so mean. Now that I’m older, I understand that some people are raised certain ways and I know prejudice is still around. **(Aleesha Flowers)**



I had cousins that moved a lot. They lived in over four different states growing up, and in result they had a hard time living a normal teenage life.

(Andreyia Gavins)



I can relate the most to him feeling like he was an “outsider” no matter how much he tried to fit in. There would still always be a reminder of where he came from. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



I can relate to having a hard time reading in front of others and feeling embarrassed and practicing in private. **(Mikaylah Harris)**



I remember being in first grade and being afraid to read out loud. I would go home and tell my grandmother, and she would force me to read. That helped my ability to sound words out, but also shaped my road into my own “homemade education.” From there I taught myself new words and their meanings. **(Synquar Harston)**



I related to moving a lot and just adjusting to changes in general. **(Cierra Jackson)**



Some parts of this story take me back to my childhood when I experienced discrimination for my native language and outfit. It was a hard and sad situation. but I understand now it was part of my journey. Some days you

are experiencing a nightmare, and other days you are harvesting your success. Now as a migrant I understand life is in constant motion. I can’t stay permanently in only one place. It is necessary to go around and explore to see all the possibilities. **(Blanca Laine)**



**Lopez)**

I relate to almost everything, especially not speaking Spanish. A Middleton school told my mom not to speak Spanish to us. Something in the story I can learn from is keep learning, keep going, and break boundaries. **(Rosanna**



I can relate to having to move a bunch of times and going to a bunch of different schools. Finally getting used to one place, you then have to just up and leave. **(Tanisha Milligan)**



Sometimes, due to living conditions of their parents, children courageously face adversities without complaining. They sacrifice their childhood and their dreams for the sake of the whole family. They do it with such discipline despite their young age. They are heroes. **(Souleymane Nikiema)**



The part that I relate to is the name of the story and the ending. There have been a lot of times in life when “The Circuit” happened to me. **(Terance Nix)**



Growing up I was scared to speak English because I didn’t know much English. **(Sally Phelps)**



My life was similar—a circuit—until I was about 20 years old. Between family, group homes, and foster homes, my life was a never-ending circuit like Francisco’s. I understand how he feels because I could never develop long lasting or good relationships. That caused trust, social, and trauma issues for me. **(Isiah Pickett)**



I learned from the story to never take my life for granted because there are people who would die to have the life that I have. My struggles are nothing compared to theirs and other people around the world too. I should be grateful for the opportunities I have to learn and for not having to move from place to place to have to work to help my family survive. **(Rodney Poe Jr)**



I can relate to the experience of having to move a lot because my life had become unmanageable and dysfunctional. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



Growing up I moved around a lot with my family from poverty to the upper middle class. Moving was hard for me. I had to learn different ways of living, and I had to make new friends and start different schools. Just when I would get comfortable, we were moving back with my granny. My life finally became stable at the age of 10 years old, so I can definitely relate to Francisco. **(Marcy Tibbs)**



The part in this story that I can relate to most is never really feeling “at home” in my home. I have had a lot of housing issues and always kind of felt the “cardboard box” feeling. I also can relate on feeling shy in class, even though English is my language. Sometimes when I read and try and understand, it’s difficult for me. **(Amanda Von Behren)**



My kids and I moved a lot in their younger years because I didn’t have an adequate source of income. We were often staying with family. As soon as my kids thought we were settled, we’d move again, but now we’re in a better place and I’m thankful for that. **(Endia Walls)**



I relate to having a teacher taking an interest. **(Ron Watson)**

ALUMNI CORNER

MEET HEZOUWE WALADA

In this article entitled “Student’s remarkable journey to starting his undergraduate degree at age 28, living his dream” for UW News on September 9, 2020, Lisa Bauer tells the story of Odyssey graduate Hezouwe Walada. Hezouwe graduated from UW in May 2023 and will apply to medical school.

In his village of Koumea in Togo, Africa, 8-year-old Hezouwe Walada watched nearly half of his community—including three of his young cousins—die of malaria in early 2000. He decided then and there he wanted to become a doctor.

But his dream seemed unattainable—his family was poor, the nearest school was far from his village and he didn’t even have shoes.



After 20 years, nearly 6,000 miles and a host of trials and tribulations, Walada started at the University of Wisconsin–Madison as a first-year student majoring in biochemistry this fall, with plans to eventually go to medical school.

“Everything is possible if you are willing to work hard and sacrifice,” says Walada, a graduate of both the UW Odyssey Project and Badger Ready. “All you have to do is believe and keep asking questions.”

From Togo to Madison

As a young child, when Walada made up his mind that he wanted to someday study medicine, he asked his father if he could attend school. He could, his father said, but not before he did morning chores. So Walada woke up 3 a.m., worked on the farm for three hours, walked 15 miles to school then walked 15 miles home at the end of the day.

“When I finished my chores, I started running to school,” he says. “I just really wanted to be a doctor and help people in my village and around the world.”

Walada studied hard and got admitted to one of the best high schools in Togo. He moved away from home and all he ever knew.

“I felt different because all my classmates had nice clothes, nice shoes and money,” he says. “I came there with two shirts, three shorts and one pair of shoes. Even though I was at the top of the class, I felt like I didn’t belong there. I was always sad because I didn’t have anything.”

But Walada persevered and eventually won a visa to go to the U.S. At age 17, he left his country for the first time, alone.

“I was terrified, but I kept reminding myself of my dream,” he says. “I knew people needed me to become a doctor. I will never forget the suffering I saw in my village. I still have flashbacks today.”

In 2009, Walada made it to Madison. Years before, he’d heard a teacher say that the University of Wisconsin–Madison was a prestigious institution. He did research online and decided to set his sights on becoming a Badger.

But his dream was delayed 10 more years.

Lacking resources and knowing very little English, Walada struggled in Wisconsin. He enrolled at Madison College, but without a stable home or sometimes even food to eat, his education stalled. He started “working like crazy”—mainly as a caregiver—to earn and save money. He met his wife, settled down and they had a daughter.

Walada began to wonder if he could ever return to his dream of becoming a physician, but he refused to give up. Then, someone told him about the Odyssey Project.



Continuing his odyssey

In 2017, Walada applied to the UW Odyssey Project, a six-credit English literature course that helps low-income adults get a jump start at earning college degrees. Odyssey became Walada’s reentry into living his dream.

“When I learned that I got into Odyssey, I was so happy,” he says. “Odyssey gave me friends, taught me how to be confident and showed me I can defy the odds and make my dream come true. I needed Odyssey to become the person that I am today.”

Through reading, writing about and engaging in lively discussions of Emily Dickinson, Martin Luther King Jr, Walt Whitman, Shakespeare, Lorraine Hansberry and

more, Walada found his own voice and found another family in his fellow Odyssey classmates. He heard stories that sounded similar to his own, learned more about slavery and was inspired to fight against injustice and for equality in the U.S. He shared stories from his culture and home country.

“Odyssey was my family, not just school. Everyone was so welcoming, and I felt that I wasn’t alone anymore,” he says. “Odyssey really taught me about life, about ambition and about how to gain confidence to be what I want to be.”

Walada then found another opportunity to keep making progress toward his dream: the Badger Ready program.

Getting Badger ready

In 2019, Walada entered the Badger Ready program, which helps adult students make the transition to college by supporting them through tailored UW–Madison coursework. As a University Special student, and scholarship recipient, Walada, who speaks seven languages, immersed himself in an English 100 class first semester.

“I was so excited that I was finally here, I went to the classroom the night before class and picked out where I wanted to sit,” he says. “I sat there alone in the classroom and thanked God for this opportunity and this journey.”



Second semester as a Badger Ready student, Walada took Biology 130. He was devastated when he got a 50 percent on his first exam. But his Badger Ready advisor encouraged him to ask questions and visit the professor during office hours. He did—after every lecture—and came out of the class with an A.

Walada successfully completed his program requirements in three semesters and was ready to apply as a transfer student to UW–Madison for fall 2020.

“I’m on a mission here in the U.S.,” he says, adding that he does see the injustice in America and vows to work against it. “This is a great country, and if I have an opportunity, I will take it. I want to give something back to this country, to Africa, to the world.”

Closer to a dream come true

As a newly admitted transfer student amid an unstable time, Walada is now an undergraduate majoring in biochemistry with a pre-health focus.

“I am ready,” he says, adding that he’s been studying all summer to prepare for the classes he is taking this fall. “I can’t believe this dream is coming true.”

After his undergraduate studies, Walada wants to attend UW–Madison’ School of Medicine and Public Health to study cardiology.

Where does he see himself in another 20 years? His dreams remain big and judging by his path so far, anything is possible: “I hope to help my country make changes to the medical system, maybe I would help other communities around the world, too, through Doctors without Borders.”

In the meantime, Walada plans to enjoy his time at UW–Madison, getting involved in a pre-health group, social justice organizations and with the Black community. He wants to relish his achievements, continue to work hard and pay it forward.

“You cannot understand how thrilled that I am to be a student here,” he says. “My advice to people fighting for their dreams is believe in yourself. Seize opportunities. Fight for your moment because it is going to come for you.”