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ODYSSEY ORACLE

MAKING A CASE FOR SECOND SEMESTER



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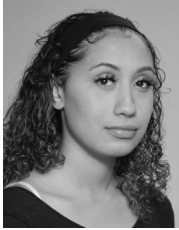
Class photography by Colleen Johnson, Em Azad, and Christina DeMars

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MAKING A CASE FOR SECOND SEMESTER

At the end of Fall 2019, Odyssey students argued for why they should continue into the second half of our two-semester humanities course.



So far, Odyssey has expanded my vocabulary, gotten me back in the habit of reading, and helped me think more deeply. I love being able to articulate my language better because now I know more words. In addition, the questions we have

to answer on our homework and worksheets challenge me to think more deeply and critically. Emily, you demonstrate so much patience and understanding, it would be difficult not to follow your lead, along with Kevin, too, of course. Since I've been in Odyssey, I have thought about continuing to further my education even more. I know I'm starting to fall behind, but once I'm caught up, falling behind will have been a minor setback for a major comeback. Seeing good, positive feedback on my work reminds me how capable I am of pursuing whatever it is that my heart desires. After I complete this program, I want to pursue life coaching, business, or finance, if not all of them, and become fluent in Spanish. Odyssey has helped me start new relationships with people and hopefully lots of connections for my future as well.

I would still love to put on a financial literacy/ financial planning presentation for class. I think I have contributed by participating in class, completing most of my homework, being a positive presence in class, and always having a willingness to learn. Continuing to be in Odyssey would help me grow in so many ways. I would grow by continuing to learn new things, building more relationships, holding myself accountable to completing what's expected of me, and constantly being inspired to do better. This has been a positive experience for me thus far; I'd hate to stop now. The odyssey has just begun. **(Aerial Bailey)**



So far this first semester, I have learned so much and I have also taught other people in my life about the people I have read about in class. Crazy thing is, I'm a very slow learner, and being in this class has helped me so much to come out of my shell. This class also has brought my sister Alice (Odyssey '19) and me closer together. When I go home, Alice asks, "So what are you working on in class?" and I tell her, and she just says, "Oh, yeah, we can talk about it after you're done." Then she will tell me her experience. So yes, this class has helped with our relationship. I love to write, but this class has made me dig deeper and open up to people more than I would have ever done. By being here and bringing my kids with me, it has also helped with our mother-and-son relationship so much—maybe a little bit too much, but in a very good way. I don't think I would have ever read any of these books, but now that I have, I love them. The only thing that I want for myself for next semester is to talk or speak up more, and to volunteer myself more to read. I would also like to get to know my classmates more and get the courage to talk to them more. If I can stay for next semester, I would love more help to push myself and open up more. **(Margarita Barajas)**





What!!!

With all due respect, it would be devastating if I wasn't

allowed to continue through to semester two. I have just started to enjoy the adventures of diving into different forms of literature, learning how to express your feelings and emotions, and driving home your point in writing. I have expanded my writing skills.



Furthermore, I have made lovingly respectful friendships and connections with many of the current Odyssey students and alumni. I have attended every class since the start of the semester and had the opportunity to represent Odyssey by starring in the stage play "A Raisin in the Sun." This has been such a gracious opportunity that I have taken very seriously. Therefore, I truly believe my journey or odyssey doesn't end until I have successfully graduated in the year 2020. Besides, it just wouldn't be the same without me. ☺ **(Ron Burford)**

"This journey has taught me more words, to remain humble, judge less, and seek more."

up on what you want and are pushing to receive. This journey is helping me continue down a better path. Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays make a difference in my life and my kids' lives. I've been battling depression as well as the use of substances. If not for this class, I feel I wouldn't have a reason other than my kids to want to push forward and wake up to a new day, to make my way to May and complete this class, and to make my family proud, especially my stepdad. **(Arkeia Cameron)**



I'm an open book, "ashamed."

NO! I tell people certain things, hoping they can take and learn from them. I'm outspoken, loud, and courageous. This journey has taught me more words, to remain humble,

judge less, and seek more. You never know what those around you are going through, so be easy and respectful. I believe my spunky personality has given back everywhere major I've been. I try not to judge a book by its cover but rather by what's in it. When I enter a room, there's a warm, joyful feeling I bring in, and I want people to know there's a tomorrow waiting for them. Never give



I've learned to be more open in front of a crowd. I've learned about some of the many backgrounds of my fellow classmates. Everyone is so interesting—their history, their trials and tribulations. I know I personally love Odyssey! Sometimes

I'm not able to attend every class, but when I miss, I literally miss, as in I miss the class and being around everyone. I feel like this class is preparing me for Nursing School next year. It's teaching me discipline and patience. It's teaching me to get in the habit of doing homework and managing time. **(Laisha Cooke)**



I am learning! My ignorance is being brought to the light. Before Odyssey, I felt stagnant, lackadaisical, and cold. I was the same

person every day. Not anymore. In a couple months' time, I've consistently read more than I've ever read in my life, and that gift is priceless. Socrates seeped his way into my open-eyed outlook, Malcolm X made me understand why literacy is so important, and Frederick Douglass made me want to be a better black man. I've been studying heroes. I'm Maya Angelou on the rise right now. We all are. I love walking into a class where there are people who look like me; it's a completely new environment than what I'm traditionally used to. And everybody is amazing. I ain't getting off the train yet; I can't. **(Corey Dean)**

"Socrates seeped his way into my open-eyed outlook, Malcolm X made me understand why literacy is so important, and Frederick Douglass made me want to be a better black man."

say Odyssey has brought me so far, changed my way of thinking, and helped my writing to change. With all the reading we are doing, I can read in front of my classmates sometimes, which is still unbelievable for me. I am so happy to be a part of Odyssey for this first semester because

I have learned to write a poem and write an essay, which I wouldn't have been able to do before.

The changes I need to make in the second semester will be to do my homework on time, to try to always come to tutoring, to do a lot of research, to ask questions about the things I don't know, and to be the best writer and reader I can be. I will make sure to do my best for attendance, just as I did in the first semester. **(Kossiawavi Elohi)**

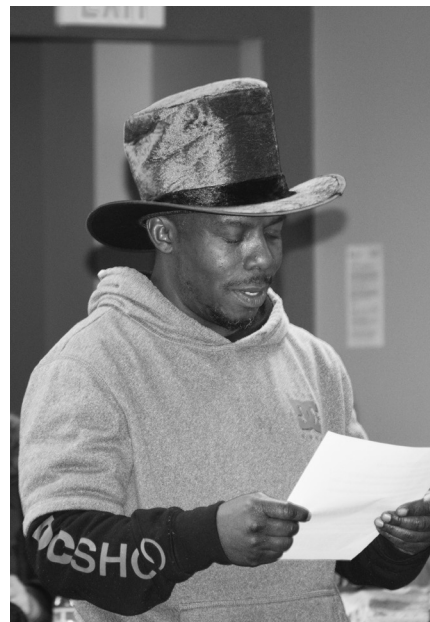
Odyssey has really been a journey for me, meeting new people and learning new things. My argument with you today on why I should be—or, should I say, why I need to be—in the second semester is because I'm learning a lot about myself. I always knew I was strong, but I've been faced with life-changing events that I thought were going to bring me to my lowest. I've gotten a lot from this class, from learning about Malcolm X to having a class that is seen as one. Odyssey as a whole has been my backbone, my peace, my safety zone. I would love to be a part of Odyssey again second semester because I need that extra push, that someone to say, "Hey, pick your head up, you've got this." I am Odyssey and Odyssey is me. One thing's for certain: you can't just quit me. **(Tiffany Dixon)**



I must admit, I've missed several classes, which might make you question my desire to keep going in this class, but my eyes have been opened to a level of writing unseen to me. I've listened to the strength of my classmates, which keeps the fire of learning in my mind. I've learned new words and how to apply them accordingly to what they mean. This class challenges me to find the value of my voice. The style of the teachers has encouraged me because I see how they share what Odyssey has meant to them. Most importantly, one day I want to return to this class to inspire others as to how Odyssey has changed me. **(Rasaki Emmanuel)**



I am Kossiawavi Apeafa Elohi, mother of two kids and a certified nursing assistant. My first day in this class, I was happy the way things went smoothly, and I encouraged myself so that I would do my best to take this journey and finish it. Right now, I can

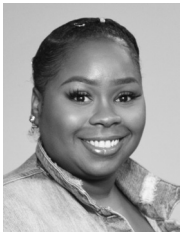




Being in the Odyssey class has been a good experience for getting me back into the swing of balancing work, school, and life. Semester one has gone by so fast, I can hardly believe it. Everyone in class has been wonderful. It saddens me that our time together as classmates is so short.

Being a part of Odyssey has opened my eyes to some of the small tweaks that can help make my writing better. I believe that my stories have been wonderful for others to read. Being able to both read and write genuine writings has a special and unique experience. It is hard for me to imagine not being in this class for the next semester.

(Melissa Herriges)



I applied for the Odyssey Project not just to get my brain working again but also to go the distance and finish. When I say finish, I mean I plan to complete both semesters. Doing so, I will feel accomplished, intelligent, proud, and honorable. It would make me feel a way I haven't felt in a long time. I've always, in some shape or form, felt like a failure because I dropped out of college my sophomore year. I have been feeling like I'm not great enough or not smart enough, feeling less than others because they have a degree or two.

I had to make a change, so I told myself I am somebody important, regardless of whether I went to college or not. Then, I just wanted better for myself. I told myself it's okay to try again; you're never too old to try again. That's when I discovered the Odyssey Project. I did a little research and decided I'd be the perfect candidate for this class. I deserve a second chance. Plus, I am more stable now than I was after dropping out of college. I plan on becoming a registered nurse one day. Odyssey is only the beginning of my journey to success. I am smart, I am important, and I am somebody. These are my reasons to carry on for second semester.

(Jyneeva Hunt)

*"I am smart,
I am important,
and I am somebody."*



Dear Odyssey classmates and staff, I'm truly sorry that I didn't have good attendance first semester and that I have to hit the pause button on my Odyssey journey. I'm a first-time mom, and I am struggling with my home life and my work life and my first year with him. I want you to know that my absence was not due to you guys--it was due to me. I thought I could do school as a single mom of a baby, but honestly I couldn't.

My favorite day of class was the first day. To see everyone open up and laugh a little made me smile. I felt everyone's energy was great, and it made me feel like I had new friends. Everyone has grown up differently, and that showed most in the Oracle. We were all more open, and I learned a little from everyone. Our field trip was also another day I truly enjoyed. We all felt so great that day, and our smiling faces on our ID cards really showed it. Although my Odyssey journey has paused so that I can focus on my son Michael and on everything I have going on outside of class, your Odyssey journey is still going, so enjoy it! I may come back and visit class if I can. I hope you guys have a wonderful year and a great graduation. **(LaDia Key)**





I feel that I should be able to attend Odyssey a second semester because I love coming to class every Wednesday and seeing my classmates. It is so fun to be around people with good vibes and energy. Coming to class makes

me forget all the stress I have going on outside of class. I am also starting to come out of my shell more. I am learning how to read better when I come to tutoring on Tuesdays. It makes me feel good that I am picking up the speed of my reading.

Education is very important to me. I love to learn and expand my knowledge. Getting all the help I need here has given me a better outlook on life; it feels good to know I have lots of support because I tend to lose hope very fast. Next class, I hope to face my fears of reading out loud. Everyone stumbles upon words; nobody is perfect! I'm so glad that I joined Odyssey. **(Ashley Lee)**



I am a person who is ready to take on a challenge, hungry for knowledge and always willing to try. I have gained so much out of Odyssey: the real knowledge that I have been looking for that I feel I was cheated out of. In school, they

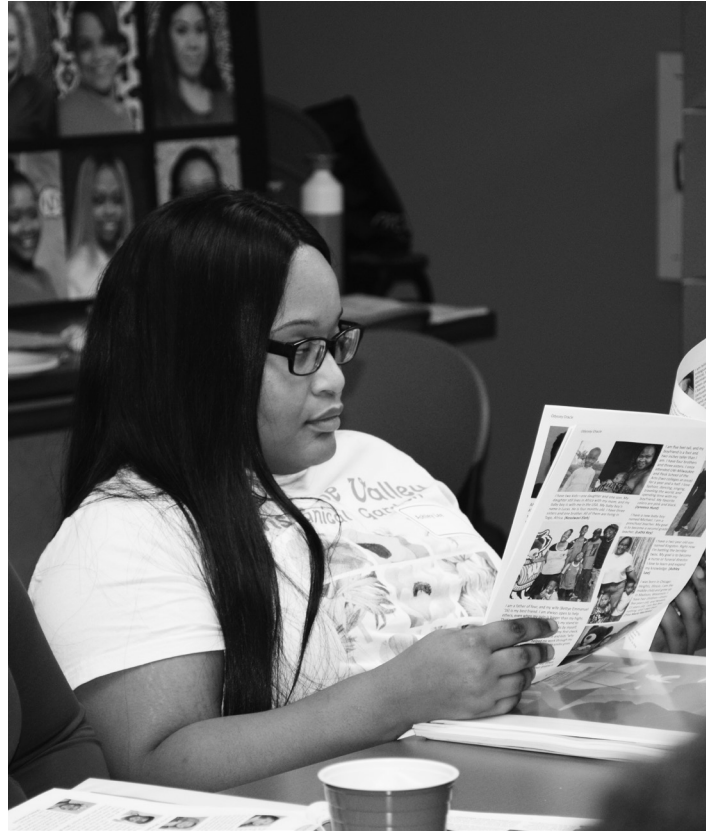
didn't teach us this way. I have a great amount of love and respect for the teachers and the students.

I have truly put my best foot forward when it comes to Odyssey, and I feel that my contribution comes from my active participation in class. I have never been late or missed one day, and I truly put 100% into all my work. I would like to be a part of second semester because I still have so much more to learn, so much knowledge to gain, and more memorable experiences to have. Because Odyssey has made itself a part of my lifestyle, it's changed me, made me a better person.

"Once you have a taste of the truth, you will never want to go back to being ignorant."

(Tina Marie Martinez)

"Odyssey has changed me, made me a better person."



For this part, I'll describe myself as a sponge absorbing and learning everything I can. So far, I have been reading and understanding what I read. To me, that is a huge improvement. Kevin has taught me that a period or a comma in writing

does make a lot of a difference when I'm reading something. Writing has been something I really struggle to do; I wish I could be much better, but perseverance will pay off eventually.

I have contributed to this program every Wednesday by showing up to class. I know that I need to open up and participate during class. When I'm with a tutor, I feel that helps me open up, so I know I can do it.

Why do I want to be a part of the second semester? Well, I'm not a quitter. I must finish what I have started, and besides that, who does not want to be part of this amazing Odyssey program? **(Elíazar Martínez-Munguia)**



This journey that we've set out on is a long and hard road. There are times when you feel you're on top and unstoppable. Then you will have those moments when you don't know who you are or why you even started this quest in the first place.

But is this not the exact reason why you chose such a quest—to push yourself to all your limits, physically, mentally, and emotionally? All your skills and wits and your will and determination will be put to the test, but how could you live with yourself if you were to fail or quit?

It has been hard, like an uphill battle trying to pull a wagon up a muddy hill, always slipping and making a little progress that makes you want to fight more. But push on you must. Give up? That would be a crazy thought. You were put to the test only to finish strong, fight the good fight, and press on. If you don't, who will? I am not ready to give up, and I still have so much to give and so much to learn from the Odyssey Program.

I am ashamed that you might feel or think I don't care when this truly is a blessing and a great accomplishment in my life. I would love and be grateful and joyous to have the love and respect of you, my peers. I would ask forgiveness [for missing classes first semester], but such words seem little and empty of action, so to you I say this: finish this journey the way we started, strong, together, and unified. Along the rest of our quest, I will fight harder and work more to gain the respect and acceptance of you, my fellow classmates. By the end of this journey, I will gain you as friends and be honored to call you my sistas and brothas in arms. Thank you! **(Ashton McDonald)**



Odyssey has already changed my life and the way I look at the world, my future, my kids, and my challenges. I feel more confident that I can achieve these once-

forgotten dreams. I discovered that when I work hard and truly put the effort into my writing, I end up with something I am proud of. Before I entered this class, I was terrified to show anyone my writing because I was embarrassed by it.

Another change has been in my thirst for literature. I always enjoyed reading, but with the direction that Odyssey has given me, I can interpret the words on a deeper level, which makes reading much more powerful. I find more interest in reading because I have the tools to analyze many different types of writing and I can understand it.

I would like to remain in this class for the next semester because I am dedicated to the work and want to be able to absorb all the education that you are able to put in front of me. **(Krista Mellott)**



I am a very shy person and usually don't like to read out loud or interact with others. But being a part of Odyssey has gotten me out of my comfort zone and has made me do things that I wouldn't normally do—good things, of course. Every day after

class, you should see how excited and charged up I am while talking to my girlfriend about class. This program has challenged me in so many ways. The biggest challenge has been learning how to write. I love a

"This program has challenged me in so many ways."

challenge, though. My girlfriend just told me the other day that she believes I am the most competitive person that she has ever met. I have to agree that I am very competitive, and I hate to lose. So being that this program is challenging to me, I treat it like it's a competition, and I give it my all. I shared a story in class about my dad that not even my close family knows. That alone tells me that I belong here. **(Tim Mosley)**





Odyssey truly is a journey. The first semester challenged me to read more and longer pieces. I've read more in the first semester than I did for the whole year, maybe two. My vocabulary has expanded. Now, whenever I read a word I

don't understand, instead of just brushing over it, I actually look up the meaning--not on my phone, but I actually make use of the dictionary given to us at the beginning of the semester.

"My vocabulary has expanded."

I can see an improvement in my writing since starting Odyssey. Now, most of my errors are punctuation and it rarely happens, whereas I remember having my entire paper look like a toddler got hold of a red pen and just went all Leonardo da Vinci on my paper correcting all my errors. So Odyssey has definitely been a confidence boost in regards to writing.

I still do not like the sound of my voice at times, especially over a recording, yet we have to read out loud and be engaging. The thought of reading out loud in front of everyone still makes my face heat up. But I am convinced that at the end of the second semester, I will be more confident and content with the sound of my voice.

Odyssey always catches me off guard with in-class writing. I need at least three to five business days to think before writing, but now I can do it in a matter of minutes.

If I have evolved, no matter how small the changes are, in one semester, I can only look forward to the improvements in the second semester, and I'd love to be a part of that!
(Loché Mothoa)



I feel like I've grown so much and become aware of writers and literature I was once not familiar with. Not enrolling me into classes next semester would be like teaching a baby how to walk and not allowing him to run. One step

always comes after another, and I feel that Odyssey is a part of my growth and story. Since I am not very talkative in class, some students don't know me as well as they could. A second semester could allow students to get to know me better and vice versa. **(Moriah Parker)**

"Odyssey is a part of my growth and story."



Since I started Odyssey, I've noticed a huge growth in the way I write my sentences and also in my vocabulary. I've gained the interest to read books; the more I read, the more I don't have to read the same story over and over again to get a

better understanding! So why stop now? Why stop growing? You guys are helping me become the best part of me, and I love it! I'm super thankful for an opportunity like this. I love coming to class with all of my positive classmates. The class is hope for

myself. I have more passion for my career now, and I'm excited. A train can't keep going on railroads that are not complete; that's only half! They would crash! So don't shorten my train tracks!
(Natia Saffold)





Last night, my mom told me she was proud of how hard I've been working in this program.

When I told her

I was accepted, she admitted to me she had doubts I'd make it to graduation because of my history with not following through. Sometimes, it feels like the only thing I've ever followed through with in life is disappointing her.

It feels good to have her acknowledge my want and need for change. I don't think I'll ever be able to right my wrongs when it comes to my mom, but she deserves that I at least try.

In my initial interview to get into Odyssey, I told Emily that at this point in my life, if I don't want better for myself, I need to do better for my son. As the months go by, I find myself wanting this more and more for myself as well as for my son, which is huge. **(Nina Salisbury)**



I started this class full of life, and with the opportunities it brings. I showed up each Wednesday excited and filled with anticipation for what each week would bring. I watched how a group of strangers in a room slowly transformed into a huge melting pot

of camaraderie, faith, and common goals, where we know one another and have built true friendship from those who were absolute strangers just weeks ago. The transformational qualities in this melting pot will bring out the greatest flavor in us all because we all are rubbing off on the other like the tastiest stew you will ever have.



I personally have developed a complete acceptance for the attention and reception I'm known for, from my height to my big personality. I feel I have, in a way, become our own class mascot wishing to keep the energy high, the laughs plentiful, and the discussions filled with meaning and purpose.

Behind closed doors, I've faced some hardships, like my phone bill threatening my daily stress intake, to custody issues with my kids, to my living situation leaving me with an hour commute to and from class.

I wanted in second semester to

continue to build on the relationships I've created with my classmates, to further excel and grow in areas of my writing and speaking out loud, and to continue to be an asset to my peers and Odyssey. But I've had to make the decision to move rapidly to Atlanta and relocate there.

I still at this very moment feel privileged to have sat amongst all of you and to have truly grown close to some of you. I truly hated to leave all of you. I can't speak any higher for the Odyssey Class of 2020. We have all had our share of challenges, losses, and shortcomings, yet I know confidently that none of us will allow anything to stop our forward progression towards the goals we've set for ourselves. Odyssey has made us believe we can achieve them through our efforts and the results we've seen from ourselves with the body of work we built so far. I won't single out any members of the class, for I truly miss each and every last one of you, even the one person who thinks "Nawl he isn't talking about me." YES, YOU!

In suddenly moving out of Madison, I took what I'm defining as my leap of faith to truly reach for and grasp a dream and goal of mine I've had since a kid, which was to live completely away from all I once knew and place my all into my goals and endeavors. I intend to use my comedy, my love for connecting with people, and the opportunities Atlanta has to offer to build my life into something I can hold and appreciate for the risk and balls it took to go off and

make it. I struggled in Madison consistently for the past two years with little to no help. An ever-present feeling of my mortality weighed heavily on my mind due to the number of loved ones and friends I had that died from violence in the little city of Madison. Some may view it as drastic, but it isn't your life you see nightly when



you sleep that gets stolen and taken in a way you feel cheated. I woke up one day determined not to allow that sight or feeling to become a fact, so I'm in a space now where I have to accept many uncomfortable parts of starting over fresh; however, I have more inner peace, my heart isn't racing randomly anymore, and I no longer care for what's going wrong in my life, for now I am focused on all the things I'm able to do to make my life right.

I truly wish you all the absolute best in all you may do. It made me slightly jealous but extremely proud when I saw the news posting on Facebook about the big check Odyssey received to help the families it serves. I'm not sure if any of you knew it, but very early in class I almost lost my van [which I was sleeping in] and had extreme difficulty getting back and forth to Madison for class. I can't thank Emily and Odyssey enough for how they came around me full circle to assist me in making my fight not one I had to fight alone. In many ways I felt so many others deserved what I was given; however, I can't thank them and you all enough for being people whose lives I can peek into for the proof that you can make it through anything as long as you don't give up. I can promise you all that my leaving was not my giving up. I'm giving my all to be the best me I can be, and I aim to make you all proud even from afar. I'm not against anyone contacting me through Facebook if they'd like to. I will miss you all dearly, and I know you all will touch the skies and stars you set to reach. **(Jerome Sanders)**



As I complete this full semester, I have been given tools to better myself as a person and a father thanks to the amazing people at the Odyssey Project. I believe what I have learned will help me in the future. If I am able to continue into the second semester (January-May) of the program, I would hope to sharpen these tools. I would take full advantage of the opportunity if given to me. I have shown that I want to be here by showing up to tutoring on Mondays and Tuesdays. I have shown up to classes on Wednesdays listening and learning from the teachers and my classmates. I believe I can be

a great asset to this upcoming semester by showing myself and my classmates that I am determined to succeed and hope to spark the minds around me.

"I want to show the person I see in the mirror that you are going to be better than yesterday."

You ask me to describe myself; well, I'm an unfinished project that when done, and with the help of others, could be a great example for my kids and others to look up to. That's what I am striving for. I want to show the person I see in the mirror that you are going to be better than yesterday.

(Marcello Segovia)

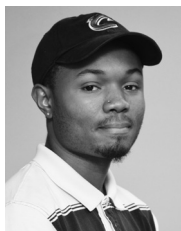


Like most people in class, I've been dealing with issues that take away from my performance in class. It's hard figuring out problems at home and coming to class and being 100% in it. Whether it's my mom's health or dealing with my own mental health, it has been tough. Through all that, though, I'm trying to keep my head up high and get all my work done. I am passionate about bettering my life and changing my thinking. This class helps with that. Next semester I want to work even harder and participate in class more. My goal is to not miss any classes next semester and get to know my classmates better. **(Riley Sessions)**



Hey! I have really enjoyed this class. Although everything else in my life has gone to s***, class has kept my mind together. This class gives both my daughter and me structure and something to look forward to every week! I never knew I would enjoy

school so much, as I hated it growing up and didn't know I could learn and care so much about history. Even though I don't speak up much, this class gives me confidence as well as joy to be in. Sooooo . . . I would HIGHLY appreciate it if you kept me in it. Thanks in advance. I love coming to a class that is full of smiles and vibrant personalities even on days half of us want to be elsewhere. **(Shiloh Simonsen)**



In the beginning, I was shy and didn't really enjoy speaking out loud or having to share my thoughts with strangers. I joined the class to help guide me in the right direction in terms of making a decision on schooling and potential career

opportunities. Now that we're a full semester in, I am more open in talking out loud and sharing my ideas, and I'm no longer just showing up for the benefits of the class. I now look forward to seeing the classmates and hearing about how their week is going and learning more about them each week. It went from a room full of strangers to a family-like environment. **(Jaison Thomas)**



I would like to continue into the second semester because I love the Odyssey Program. It has helped me open my mind.

Now I have it clear that everything I want to achieve is possible with dedication.

I think I have contributed to it by attending my class every Wednesday and doing my homework. I almost forgot to mention how quickly the semester was spent. **(Carmen Tinajero)**



As I sit here and think of reasons why I should be a part of the second semester, a lot of negative comes to mind. I have done far less than most students, who worked hard and deserve their spot here. I haven't studied like I should have, and have

not made class a priority, but over these last couple of months through the Odyssey Project, I have found a group of people who made me believe in myself, who gave me strength and courage to pursue my dreams. They helped me believe that people do care and showed me that they believe in me. To Odyssey, that might be their job, but for me, that brought a new me out, a positive side, a person with more ambition to believe in myself and what I am possible/capable of doing. I needed this encouragement and people in my life to help me pursue my vision, goals, and show myself and my daughters anything is possible. I want to succeed and show my daughters they should never give up. With support, it is possible. I want to inspire and help others the way Odyssey has done for me.

(Savannah Torres)



I have learnt a few new things since I've started in the Odyssey Project, things that I've forgotten from high school and some new things as well. I would say that since we started this project, my horizons have somewhat

broadened. Thanks to the Odyssey Project, I can push forward to realize my dreams.

I should be a part of the new semester because I am willing to go the extra mile to achieve my future goals. Through Odyssey staff and classmates who push me to my full potential, I think I can do it.

(O'Shane Wilmoth)

