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ODYSSEY



ORACLE

WELCOME, CLASS OF 2025!



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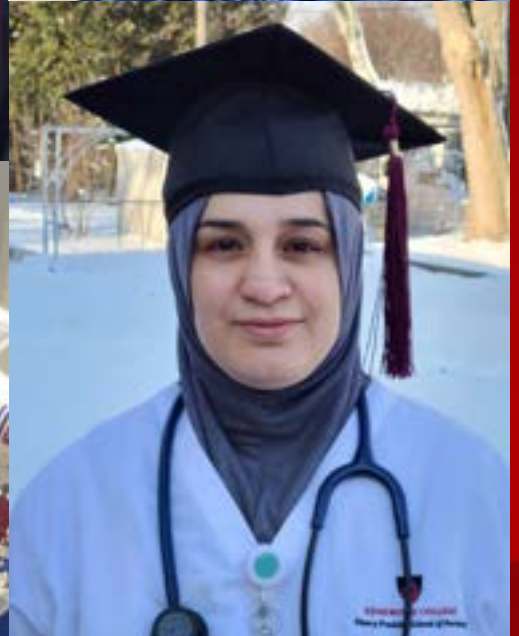
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Pictured on pp. 1-7 are some of our many Odyssey graduates who have earned associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees from Madison College, UW-Madison, Edgewood, and other schools: Shaimaa Ahmed '16; Zeynab Ahmed '14; Ahmad Alkheder '17; Sherreallyum Allen '05; Keena Atkinson '10; Brian Benford '07; Sherri Bester '08; Michelle Bozeman '11; Char Braxton '06; Lavern Brown '09; Michelle Brown '05; Kegan Carter '04; Luci Chikowero '14; Dominique Christian '09; China Moon Crowell '13; Yolanda Cunningham '12; Cameron Daniels '07; Jellisa Edwards '16; Jayvonna Fleming '16; Tom Gardner '08; Molinda Henry '07; Kiara Hill '11; Tiffany Hite '04; James Horton '08; Yasmin Horton '08; Jessica Jacobs '21; Rhonda Johnson '09; Shaquida Johnson '12; Milli Lau '14; Shanita Lawrence '09; Joanna Lopez '05; Josephine Lorya '08; Michael Lozano '11; Ricardo Marroquin '19; Tasha McKenzie '10; Krista Mellott '20; Adrian Molitor '18; Shirley Norman '04; Moriah Parker '20; Nicole Barnett Pecku '09; Lolita Phillips '13; Jaleah Price, Odyssey Junior; Edwina Robinson '11; Sahira Rocillo '15; Mustafa Saed '16; Umaima Saed '16; Corey Saffold '06; Cherri Sorrells '17; Robert Taliaferro, Beyond Bars '19; Kala Taylor '16; Marisela Tellez-Giron '16; Mai Neng Thao '16; Dauntrea Vance, Odyssey Junior; Hezouwe Walada '19; Anthony Ward '04; Mary Wells '07; Sarah Wells, Senior '24



LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2025

Dear Class of 2025,



Don't give up and give yourself grace. This sounds easier said than done, but trust that those daily affirmations/reminders hold power, just like all of the words we speak hold power. Lean on your family and friends when times get hard. I know

exactly how it feels to carry the load all alone, and that is exactly what I did this semester in school, which caused me to be stressed out. I wish I would have leaned on my family and friends sooner.

You will grow tremendously throughout this course. Take in the information, pay attention in class, and LISTEN! Engage in the classroom and don't be afraid to share with your classmates your writings. Don't worry, future Odyssey students, you got this! With faith in yourself, you can get through anything! **(Dontaeva Acklin)**



The first thing I can tell you is not to let this opportunity pass you by. Odyssey is a journey, yes, but one of plenty of enlightenment! There will be days where you question why you are here, if this is right for you, etc. When you feel those

emotions, ask yourself: Do I want to grow? Take your time easing into the class but not too much because before you know it, you'll be in my spot not wanting this year to be over.

As with most things in life you'll be challenged, but do not give up! Every educator genuinely wants to help you become a better version of yourself! Hold yourself accountable for the effort you put in, and you will do just fine! Communicate, participate, and reciprocate!



At the beginning of the year, I was excited, but as life events unfolded, I started to lose that. Here I am with three weeks of classes left and I have come full circle. I'm excited again for what is ahead. I have truly gained new friends and a new family! My advice is to appreciate the opportunity! You will love the class, the activities, and the people you engage with. Think out of the box and give yourself the fire and desire to grow, learn, and change. Class of 2025, claim your victory ahead of time! You have all the support you need here at Odyssey! **(Carissa Andrews)**



Sometimes I like to take a moment in class and look around the room at all the beautiful faces. Some classmates are listening intently, and others are taking notes or letting their minds wander outside of the classroom where the needs of

life can feel a hundredfold and heavy, but here in our classroom we have our little oasis...our intellectual paradise.

You have come here, across the desert where nobody let you drink when your lips were parched and cracking. You have crawled from deep dark caves where blind white beasts licked their lips and the sun was never allowed to shine. You have swum across choppy waters that chilled your heart and robbed you of your breath. You are here, now. You've made it. You can only be here...now.

Now, I want to congratulate you, and your ancestors want to congratulate you, and your highest purpose wants to wrap you up in the biggest hug and fill you with so much joy that you can barely breathe except to gasp out a little prayer because you made it. You got yourself here and you are worth it. F**k anyone who said otherwise and forgive them for their emptiness.

You've heard it time and time again: you get out what you put in. Set aside the time for the readings and do your homework. The homework can be challenging, but it is less of a challenge than the coursework you'll find in a traditional college class, and doing the work will help prepare you for whatever is next, whether it be college or your next big goal.

Come correct - this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity so do everything you can to take advantage of it. If there is anything in your way—mental health, addiction, poverty, ignorance, toxic relationships—recognize what has held you back in the past and plan on doing anything and everything you can to address your obstacles. Know that there is help and support in the Odyssey community and beyond. The Odyssey community members will do everything in their power to guarantee you succeed; your job is to try your hardest and ask for help if you need it.

Finally, be as present as you can be in class. I mean, turn your phone on "do not disturb," take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions, and get ready to tuck into a buffet of ideas, thinkers, and powerful conversations. Be proud that you've arrived here and thank yourself for making this investment in yourself. Trust the process. Show up. Amaze yourself at how far you've come when you graduate in May. Lots of love and joyous energy for your Odyssey. **(Lucas Benford)**





You made it. Congratulations! Yes, Emily is really that cool. The entire staff at Odyssey holds you down, by the way. The support you receive from staff is unmatched and will be so unexpected. Dinners are cool, the stipends are better, but the

love and support you get from your Odyssey family is unmatched.

There are days that storms are heavy in life, and you walk into class with smiles and Ms. Emily with a top hat on quoting Scrooge or Bob at a piano. Walking through an art museum getting your own personal tour learning about new art and cultures. The day you get your University of Wisconsin I.D. badge. I felt like a rapper getting their labels chain on signing day. Doing projects that help deal with your past to be better for your future. Reading Plato, Socrates, Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, and I could keep going. All I have is gratitude and appreciation for Odyssey, and if you believe in yourself and the opportunity you have been given, you will too. Good luck and be great!
(Jasmine Benson)



Welcome to the beginning of your educational journey. I'm going to be honest when I say that I had no idea what I was stepping into when

I applied to be in this program. But I can say that it was the best decision I ever made in my life. Everyone in the Odyssey program is welcoming and warm. Everyone wants nothing but the best for you and to help you achieve your educational goals. Even when you feel at your worst, and you want to give up, DON'T! Emily wouldn't allow you to do so even if you tried. You can't leave Kevin out as he is a rock for the Odyssey program and an all-around amazing person who actively

advocates to help you be the best. Be prepared to have your photo taken by the other Emily A. ("Em" Azad) at the most random times as well. This class is fun yet serious! Be unapologetically you and have an amazing semester! You will not regret it. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**



How do you feel? You've accomplished the first step of a huge change in your life. You may not feel like it on day one, but your classmates will be a part of you forever. The journey you're about to take is absolutely amazing! I wanna tell

you it will be easy, but I would be lying, I will tell you this, you'll come out a better person after the class is over. You will grow so much from learning discipline, going out of your comfort zone, and being tested in ways you'd never imagine. My best advice is always show up and don't be afraid to ask for help! it won't take you long to realize everyone genuinely has your best interest and the greatest of intentions. If you do your part, they will do theirs. I wish you the absolute best, and I would also like to say I'm proud of you for taking the first step. Good Luck ☺ **(Mia Cannon)**





What a special day this is for you. I first would like to say I'm so proud you decided to step out on faith and courage to take a step for change. What an honor it is to be hand picked out of many applicants. This shows you are special and chosen to sit in that exact seat.

When I began this "Odyssey" of my reentry to school, I wasn't sure at first what I was going to take from it. A month prior of the first day of class, I was struck by a car while bicycling, leaving me with a broken tibia, seven screws, and a metal plate in my leg. So, it's safe to say I wasn't in the best condition. I allowed many thoughts to discourage me of the possibilities this program had to offer. Thoughts due to age and life circumstances led me to believe it was too late for me even to consider school. However, the love and support I received was overwhelming. They made me feel at home, and that was just what I needed. Those discouraging thoughts were soon defeated with thoughts of hope and purpose.

I believe we are all on this earth for a reason. Although you may not be sure of that reason yet, just keep going; there are no coincidences. You are right where God wanted you to be at this time in your life. Keep the faith and courage, and I'm sure you will succeed. **(Vernell Cauley)**



Everybody can't come, not even the old you. Hundreds of applications a year, but you proved to Odyssey why it should be you. An opportunity for the next level, a desirable network, new friends, and a place where they welcome you with open

hands. Here at Odyssey, the outcome from the plan depends on you. Some have no clue, but with the support from Odyssey, you'll pave the way and create a journey that's just for you.

Being raised in broken homes, being a minority in places you thought you belonged, being judged by



things you thought were right and others thought were wrong. Questioning yourself, who am I? What am I to do? Am I good enough? And for some the question is: What makes the next better than you? Well, in Odyssey they'll explain and educate you and have many looking at life in a different way. So always remember that attendance is important, don't miss your beat, make sure you're one of the thirty in a seat, it's only once a week. And if you fall short, just show up for tutoring. What can I say, this is an opportunity that can't be beat. Monthly stipends, 1-2 days no cooking, and six free credits from a top university. Wake up, don't sleep! **(Taeshia Clark)**



Odyssey class can be overwhelming, scary, and uncomfortable. But you should know that you deserve to be here, and Emily chose you for a reason. I can't put into words what you'll experience in Odyssey because it is life

changing. The people you will meet and the stories you'll hear will have you hugging a total stranger. Odyssey is a journey, but it's a journey that you create and continue to build beyond this room. You may have times when you want to give up, but just know that what you're doing is setting you up for a future worth living. **(Mekicia Davis)**



This is the beginning of one of the most important journeys of your life. I am happy to congratulate you and welcome you to Odyssey.

I think that you have made a very wise choice applying for the

Odyssey Project. I really enjoyed my experience at Odyssey. It is truly a special place. I had no reason to be afraid of this opportunity, and you do not have to be afraid either. As I sit down to write this letter of advice to you, I realize how strange it is because I was in your shoes not too long ago. You might be nervous as you enter this next phase of your life, but it is OK. What is not OK is letting your fear or nervousness keep you from trying new things or taking chances that come your way.

Odyssey is the time for you to figure out what you want to do in life. No one expects you to know as soon as you set foot in the room. I really hope you enjoy your time here at Odyssey. Everyone here is friendly, welcoming, and more than willing to help. They want you to succeed, so do not be afraid to ask questions!

When I found out I was accepted into the Odyssey Program, I was so excited. I was also a little nervous and did not know what to expect from the program. I was thinking to myself, am I going

to be able to juggle working two jobs, being a single mother of five, coming home from working and having to do my motherly duties, then once I get done finding a way to set aside some time to complete my homework? I knew that most days I would just want to lie in bed and enjoy my me time, but I knew that I couldn't. I had homework that needed to get done.

I know that procrastination might get the best of you as it did for me sometimes, but you have to fight it. Work your hardest and make sure you come to class, even if it is just one of those days and you are not in the mood and do not feel like coming. You just want to stay in bed. Turn things in on time. You have the opportunity to make new friends, even learn more about who you are. Some days will feel like a challenge, and you may feel like something in class is challenging you as well, but don't let that feeling take over. There is childcare set for you on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Make sure you attend tutoring and get your homework done. Don't wait until the last minute to do your homework. Do your best not to fall behind. If you need transportation, just ask. All the resources are here! All you have to do is ask.

Trust me, nine months will go by extremely fast. I promise you that during your first semester, you will get adjusted quickly and will consider Odyssey your happy place. It's a great experience, and I am

forever grateful. You won't regret coming here. You have so many resources that there's no way you can fail, as long as you try your hardest. Remember this: you are the chosen one. You have been chosen to attend Odyssey. Just try your hardest, make sure you believe in yourself, and do not be afraid to get help when you need it. Study hard and have fun! I wish you the best on your new journey. Once again, welcome to Odyssey. Good luck! **(Andrea Evans)**





This Journey, this Odyssey, will be the best! Coming on your first day, you may feel nervous or shy, maybe unsure of what to expect. I'm going to tell you to expect nothing but greatness, comfortableness, and having a voice! You will not be shy by

the end of the year, guaranteed. Emily's big heart and wonderful classes make you eager for the next class.

A couple important things to always make a habit of is make every class. Your presence is very important, even if you are not done with your homework. Take advantage of tutoring. Kevin is amazing and I will always appreciate his insights and inputs on my assignments. The entire Odyssey staff are all very supportive and available for anything and anyone. You will make friends and learn a lot. Then boom, you're graduating!!! Congratulations, Class of 2025, and I wish you all the best from here on! **(Aleesha Flowers)**



Life may be tough, and things will get rough. There will be bad days, it may all seem like a haze. I myself became pregnant [with twins!] and there were days I just wanted to sleep and do nothing. But I knew I didn't want to fall behind, and being

successful is my dream.

So, I understand there will be bad days. But through it all, always, always stand tall. Giving up is not an option. Never turn your back and run. Through good times and bad, through happy times and sad, as long as you keep moving, you'll never stop growing. Always be kind, support each other, and be on time! **(Andreya Gavins)**



As you embark on this exciting journey, I want you to know that you are extremely lucky to be here. Each one of you was individually handpicked to be a part of this special voyage, and that speaks volumes about your potential and capabilities.

You have been chosen because they see something unique in each and every one of you. You have the power to achieve great things and make a positive impact on the world. Remember, you can do anything you put your minds to. Believe in yourself, work hard, and never underestimate your own potential.

One piece of advice I have for you is to always come to class with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Education is a powerful tool, and by actively engaging in your studies, you will unlock countless opportunities for growth and success.

Embrace this opportunity with enthusiasm and determination. The journey ahead may have its challenges, but I have no doubt that you have what it takes to overcome them. You are here for a reason, and that reason is to shine bright and make a difference.

Welcome to the family, and remember, the sky's the limit! **(Shanigel Goodwan)**





Welcome to your first day of class, I know some of you are thinking you may not be able to do this. Class, you may be going through a lot in your personal life, but please know you can. There are a lot of supportive staff members who will be there every step of the way.

You will never feel alone, and if you are, Emily always says, “Feel free to text or call me,” and she means it.

The bonds and friendships you will make throughout this journey will not only open up your eyes but also help you take the steps to better yourself and push you to go get that degree that you have always thought about but put aside because you may have not known where to start or how to start.

My one request is that you don’t give up and take this class seriously because you were chosen for a reason. This is your time to not prove to others but to yourself that you are worthy enough of a degree no matter what. **(Mikaylah Harris)**



Congratulations on this new chapter of your life. Breathe, relax, and bask in this moment. Be grateful and take advantage of this opportunity. This is what Odyssey was built for—to take hold of your destiny and replenish you with the tools, community,

compassion, tears, connections, and the uncomfortability that’s going to greet you soon. Put forward your best effort in all aspects in life, even if it presents itself being insufficient to you personally. Address assignments with confidence to convey your passion in your journey. You never know who’s listening! **(Synquar Harston)**



Congratulations on being accepted into the Odyssey program. I’m so very proud of you! First, I want to start by saying, don’t be afraid to ask for help and, NO MATTER WHAT, show up for class. I don’t care if your hair isn’t

done, if you’ve been yelling at the kids all day...it doesn’t matter, COME! You’ll feel much better, I promise you.

Odyssey is a family. Our classes are made up of diverse individuals with different strengths and interests. Get to know people, learn names, create a new family because it’s possible. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and seek help when you need it. The Odyssey program offers incredible resources, from knowledgeable professionals to supportive staff. This year we even got an advocate that works directly with MATC. Get to know her (Christine Cina)—she’s great!



As you navigate through your Odyssey journey, remember self-care is important. The work may seem intense just like anything else in life we’re not familiar with... but take breaks and don’t forget to always celebrate yourself. Remember you are somebody because you made it. Now take this opportunity, and make sure the world remembers your name. **(Cierra Jackson)**



Your time has arrived, your destiny is written. Odyssey is a journey you will remember forever. Congratulations! You are the chosen one between hundreds of applicants, and this is not a miracle or coincidence: this is a result of

your perseverance and your determination to change your life and raise your voice. Probably, you are right now sitting in the same seat that I was, wondering if this will work out for you. Believe me, this will work out because you are not alone anymore if that was your case. Odyssey Project offers you innumerable resources that will help you to explore your hidden potential. Furthermore, you will have the support of a terrific Odyssey Team like Emily, Kevin, Brian, Sarah, Em, Duke, and more that will not allow you to give up.

Continue and enjoy every single moment of this opportunity and the energy of your classmates and instructors because this experience will go by in the blink of an eye. You will miss it so badly at the end of the program. I am happy this Odyssey Project family is growing more and more, and you are part of this family. Keep always pursuing your goals, your dreams, the decision that brought you here, that will help you to determine your success. Welcome again, new Odyssey students 2025. This is your time. Your time is bright. **(Blanca Laine)**



You came, you grabbed, and you conquered. You are worthy to be here whether you know it or not. You're in for a ride, a lot of mind explosions, a lot of unknowing and knowing. This is truly an odyssey, so much enlightenment and one showing

true raw self-discovery and vulnerability that your classmates will grow on you and will find that all of them have a place in your heart to take with you! Have fun, laugh, cry, don't be afraid to ask for help. And you will have Kevin next to you on Tuesdays to save you mentally and emotionally. Kevin is a phenomenal teacher and Char is so caring, making sure everyone is fed and has a tutor, and Brian and Duke show up to overcome obstacles. Emily is breaking barriers for education for us, for you. This is your new class family and fellowship that you will never forget. **(Rosanna Lopez)**



If you are sitting in one of these chairs, reading this Oracle, then that means Professor Emily Auerbach saw something in you that moved her. You will blink and this transformative experience will be over. I

had a rough start and almost convinced myself to drop out entirely. I struggled from September through October to find my footing. It had been 10 years since I had tried school, and I found myself reverting back to my substance use because of this newfound stress. I reached out to Brian Benford, our Odyssey Success Coach, and I am so happy I did.

Everyone you see here wants to support you. They will not let you fall down or even fade away. That is how much they love you. When I walked into this room last September, I didn't have very much love for myself. If you relate to that, this class will illuminate whatever light has gone dim within you. It certainly did for me. Don't be afraid to put your heart and soul into your writing. This class is a beautiful opportunity to put things down on paper that perhaps you never thought you would share.

Take advantage of every single writing prompt. This class will help you heal.

Above all, there will be moments when you will be tired and you will feel restless and want to go home. But please remember, not everyone got picked to be where you are sitting, and Emily picked YOU.

(Giana Mason)



You made it to be the next Odyssey class. Here are a couple of things to know. Always stay on top of your homework. It might get stressful at times, but remember why you were chosen for this opportunity. Ask for help and go to tutoring. Don't be

ashamed: they are there to help you. Last but not least, don't be afraid to speak up and participate in class. And remember the 30 of you just became a family. **(Tanisha Milligan)**



My name is Souleymane, and I am from Burkina Faso. I was a part of a wonderful journey in the company of great people. As you know, even good things come to an end, but the tasty memories, the sensations of terrific moments last forever. It is

with great pleasure that I address you through this writing. This essay is an expression of my humble opinion about the Odyssey Project.



The Odyssey program is like an oasis in the middle of the desert. It is an exceptional journey full of learning provided by experienced and selfless staff. The environment provided is peaceful, friendly, and serene— everything is set up to make perfect strangers become friends and even family— respectful and willing to work together despite their differences. Odyssey staff is like a family of nice and altruistic people who work tirelessly to help you become a better version of yourself— and open new doors.

There is a lot of interesting information to learn— you will rediscover yourself and discover talents that you have— but were not aware of. You will explore multiple fields such as literature, art, history, philosophy, writing, etc. You will have the support of excellent and dedicated professors/tutors— advice, and teaching from prominent guests. You will also get access to resources such as childcare, moral support, counseling, food, books, transportation and more— in brief, you will receive everything you need to pursue your education and bounce back in life.

However, to make this program work beautifully and reach its goals, you will have to put in some work—no matter how much help you get, to succeed you need to be committed and work hard to do your part as a last piece of the puzzle. Stand up firmly— seize that lifetime opportunity as a steppingstone to give life to your dreams. All you must do is to free your mind from any prejudice, any lack of self-confidence, any fear you may have—and empower yourself with an unwavering determination to change your life. Be ready to challenge yourself and exceed your limits—never forget that you have all the support you need and make sure you use it— make yourself available to come to class, it is primordial— always friendly and enriching.

Despite challenges, and no matter the sacrifices—the sublime result at the end fills us with indescribable joy of accomplishment— many have done it, we did it! You also can and will do it—So, relax and enjoy your journey. **(Souleymane Nikiema)**



Today is the day that will change your life. I just wanted to ask you, are you ready? I wasn't, but you don't have to be. All it takes is to be willing. My first day, I was

so nervous I could have fainted, but to be honest that was every class session. Besides that, every class session was worth going to, and you might feel how you feel that very first day. I almost made the mistake to not come back to class and give everything back that I received that day, like the laptop and the books. The next week, I was going to fold like Walter from *A Raisin in the Sun*, and if you're as lucky as this class, you'll be reading that book.

I want you to know this program absolutely helps you face your fears, chase your dreams, and capture your goals. It's just up to you to take the journey. Everybody in the Odyssey family will help you with anything they can. They give you absolutely everything to succeed and nothing to fail. Just remember the first step. Just come to class. Everybody knows life happens, but so does success. Today is your time. **(Terance Nix)**



First of all, CONGRATULATIONS! You're the chosen one. This is not your ordinary class of school you're in. This is going to be the most memorable journey of a lifetime. I guarantee it!

This is where strangers come together and become a family. There's no judgment, nothing but excitement in class every week. Come as you are, no matter what you're going through in life. We all have obstacles, but don't let that stop you from coming to class or be discouraged. You're in good hands. You have an amazing staff that will help and guide you every step of the way. It's time to come out of your shell. It's your time to shine to be the person God created you to be. Enjoy this journey! **(Sally Phelps)**



Odyssey helps you become the best version of yourself. It helps you open up and see the world through a lens that had been shattered. It allows you to start putting it back together. You're surrounded by people who are supportive and have similar roller coaster lives. Odyssey gives you a safe space.

I really looked forward to every single Wednesday. Being surrounded by all 30 classmates and Odyssey staff makes you feel like you can endure and find your purpose. The guests are tremendously amazing, inspiring, and powerful. It's not only just a great opportunity for schooling, but it's also a place where you find your path, build your path, and walk your path.

You are surrounded by 30 people that come from very different backgrounds. However, as they begin to speak and as you begin to learn, you realize that you guys are more similar than you could even imagine. I originally thought walking in to the class I would be judged or misunderstood, but it was the complete opposite experience.

You guys will have way more in common than you think. Just be open to it and accepting of each other. You'll see it helps you open up and find your voice. Odyssey helps you find your path, and you will see a little bit clearer as it guides you to get to where

you want to be. You will learn how to become the best version of yourself and embark on your new next journey.

I'm so grateful and extremely honored to have been given the opportunity and the privilege to be a part of such a powerful program and even more extraordinary people. All the guest speakers, trips, plays, and museum showed me that I needed to be here in these moments at this point of my life.

While you take this journey, embrace every moment and don't take it for granted. I promise you won't forget it. No matter how hard it gets, don't give up. Come to Odyssey with an open mind, free heart, and open spirit.

You're gonna gain so much by the time it ends. You're gonna be a different person but in the best ways possible. So thank you again personally to the staff and the students. And I wish the future class as much success as my classmates and I had.

(Isiah Pickett)



Embrace and be thankful for the opportunity you're being given. With that being said, congratulations! You're going to experience and learn so much you probably didn't expect to or learn in high school. The most exciting part about it (or at least for me) was that I had fun with it. All thanks to Mrs. Emily, who will not let you give up; trust me, I tried, and I am so happy that I didn't.

Off the bat, just come in, be yourself, don't be judgmental because everyone has a story just like you, and lastly just give it your all. The Odyssey Program isn't here to just help you slip through the cracks. What I have learned is that they really want to see you reach your full potential. You're going to meet people with maybe the same story as you who have overcome, or on top of that you might be going through that same story with your classmates. Another way it's one big family, and myself personally, I couldn't be happier to be a part of it. Welcome to the Odyssey family! **(Rodney Poe Jr.)**



First and foremost, I give thanks to God for allowing me this opportunity to be part of the Odyssey family. I truly welcome all of you (class of 2025).

I have always felt that education is very important. I have been stumbling throughout my education journey, taking small steps to large steps, taking shortcuts, struggling, trying so hard not to give up.

Odyssey has offered sustainability for me to overcome the barriers in my life that have blocked me from completing my education. Since Odyssey, I feel more comfortable with my writing skills, self-esteem, and growth within myself. I learned from Odyssey that no matter what, come to class, and if possible, never miss a day. This will help prevent you from falling behind in your classwork.

Because of all the great support that Odyssey has offered me, I had no barriers to stop me from getting the education I received. Thanks for the transportation, childcare, nutritious food, tutoring, dinner with all of my Odyssey classmates, activities, all of the awesome events I attended, and a loving and respectful environment and much, much more. Odyssey has been one of my best inspirations that I have experienced in my life. This has been a great journey for me and my new Odyssey family. I love you, Odyssey, for life! **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



Wow! You made it, welcome. I'm so happy that you made the decision to further your education. Get ready to embark on an odyssey that will change your life and others around you. First and foremost, you have gained a family of angels which includes staff and

new students. Always remember to embrace and care for those around you because you never know that the next person is going through or feeling. This may take you quite a while because you never know the connection you may have to them. Take this class and this year seriously, and remember that you have help no matter what the situation is. Always finish your homework because it is easy to fall behind. You have the most amazing people within this program who, no matter what, will be only a phone call away. Never be scared to be open and loud or to express how you feel. Remember we are family no matter the race, sex, age, or where you come from. Again, welcome and I hope you enjoy every part of Odyssey as you embark on this new journey with family and friends on your journey to success. P.S. Remember a closed mouth does not get fed. Open up. **(Marcy Tibbs)**



When I first started Odyssey, I was so nervous. Being a single mom and working full time, I never thought I would have the opportunity to dig my brain again with school. This program has all the tools to guide you to success. You will quickly see after the first

class how everyone turns from a stranger to family. Every class pushes you more to think outside the box. There are so many opportunities to do things you have never done before without facing judgment. Don't be afraid to use your voice. Raise your hand and be involved. Make sure you open up to the teachers because they really do care (they aren't just talking) LOL. Also, attend tutoring... Kevin and his team of tutors are ready to help.

This opportunity has given me hope again—the confidence to get back in school and apply myself. I know that it's NOT TOO LATE for me to do better for MYSELF! Emily and her team will be there for you every step of the way. Now buckle up and do the damn thang! Welcome to the family, Class of 2025! **(Amanda Von Behren)**



Let me start by saying you're on your way to one of the best journeys that you'll encounter as a student. The staff and support that you will be given is like the love of a family that is well blended and shows unconditional

love. You will meet classmates from all different walks of life, not knowing that in many ways you're so much alike. Don't get discouraged. Some days will not be easy, but know there's always help from the staff to your classmates. Keep pushing through because at the end you'll have accomplished a goal that can open more doors and opportunities. I wish you nothing but success and that you achieve your highest potential. I'm proud of you even though we've never met. Enjoy this experience and make us proud. Love always. **(Endia Walls)**



Welcome to your continuous journey. My name is Ron, and I am an older (59) student in the class. What I would like to say is not to put too much pressure on yourself. That's exactly what I did in the first semester, and in my opinion,

I didn't do a good job. Writing is not my strong suit. Tell a story, wonderful; however, putting it on paper is like jumping in a lion's den. Don't be afraid to give a wrong response during in-class discussion. Myself, I tend to learn better actually hearing; it gives me a better understanding than reading. It's about coming together as a unit to keep everyone safely aboard.

Of course, if you're like me, you're not going to understand 90% of the reading in the beginning, at least I didn't. This is where common sense comes into play. We do understand right from wrong. Odyssey is a journey! In this class, I was given the opportunity to examine my past and present. My odyssey was/is about life. We all have a purpose and I have discovered mine. The road hasn't been easy, more bruises and scars than one person should endure. Now my journey is ahead of me, and I know now where the road leads. Make friends with yourself and you will never be alone **(Ron Watson)**

ALUMNI CORNER

DON'T QUIT

BY JOE ROBINSON '04

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



Joe Robinson with his family

WE ATE DOG FOOD

BY ALICE MCDANIEL '09

WRITTEN FOR KEVIN MULLEN'S
ODYSSEY ALUMNI COMPOSITION CLASS



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We ate dog food, but we were rich.

ODYSSEY POEM

BY ANTHONY JEFFERSON ‘17

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

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

Sentence by sentence, we forge a new tale.



SPECIAL ODYSSEY MOMENTS



UW Chancellor Mnookin at Odyssey's 20th anniversary celebration; Jasmine Banks '13, Keena Atkinson '10, and Josephine Lorya '08 received YWCA Women of Distinction Awards; Stanley Sallay '07 and Tosumba Welch '13 meet *Just Mercy* author Bryan Stevenson; Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway pronounces April 20, 2023 "Odyssey Day" citywide; Class of 2014 students featured on Capital City Hues cover.



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