

YEAR 22

MAY 7, 2025

ODYSSEY ORACLE

CELEBRATING THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2025!





SONG OF THE CLASS OF 2025

We are the Odyssey Class of 2025!

We have worked as a server, cleaner, cashier, nanny, baker, daycare teacher, data checker, package handler, medical cleaner, phlebotomist, pizza maker, garden center stock boy, landscape laborer, patient advocate, resource specialist, warehouse worker, veterinary assistant, car salesman, claims adjuster, bartender, CDL driver, waiter, barista, greenhouse attendant, cosmetologist, line cook, transcriptionist, dental assistant, wedding server, dietary aide, Illinois tollway representative, billing specialist, administrative assistant, lab tech, CNA, aviation customer service representative, caterer, correctional officer, and mother, with jobs at Chipotle, Wendy's, Dane County Airport, St. Mary's Hospital, VA Hospital, Schoep's Ice Cream, Qdoba, American Family Insurance, Olive Garden, Great Dane, Buffalo Wild Wings, St. Vincent de Paul Processing Center, Amazon, and Uncle Joe's Shoes & Sportswear.

We hail from Madison, Stoughton, Fitchburg, Monona, Janesville, Beloit, and Kenosha, Wisconsin; from Merryville, Indiana; Long Island, New York; Irving, Victoria, Brownsville, and Austin, Texas; Roseville, Minnesota; Chicago, Joliet, and Rosedale, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; Tennessee; Aguascalientes and Neza, Mexico; and the Gambia,

With ancestors coming from Indiana, California, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Illinois, New Jersey, Florida, Arkansas, Minnesota, Missouri, and New York; from Mexico, El Salvador, Jamaica, Cameroon, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Germany, Ireland, Greece, France, Ghana, Nigeria, and the Gambia in West Africa,

Speaking Spanish, English, German, Irish, French, Mandinka, Nahual, and Patois,

Worshipping as Baptist, Catholic, Coptic, Jehovah's Witness, Muslim, "some kind of Christian," atheist, land-embracing, and spiritual.

We call ourselves angry, creative, daring, muscular, fun, happy, firm, direct, short, tall, thoughtful, distracted, shy, brave, bright, hardworking, eccentric, funny, joyful, very busy, determined, resilient, silly, outgoing, crazy, quiet, cute, talkative, hopeful, small, loud, lost, proud, curvy, smiley, enthusiastic, black and beautiful.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2025!



UW ODYSSEY PROJECT CLASS OF 2025 GRADUATION CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 2025, 6-7:30 PM

GREAT HALL, MEMORIAL UNION, MADISON, WISCONSIN

ORDER OF EVENTS

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC

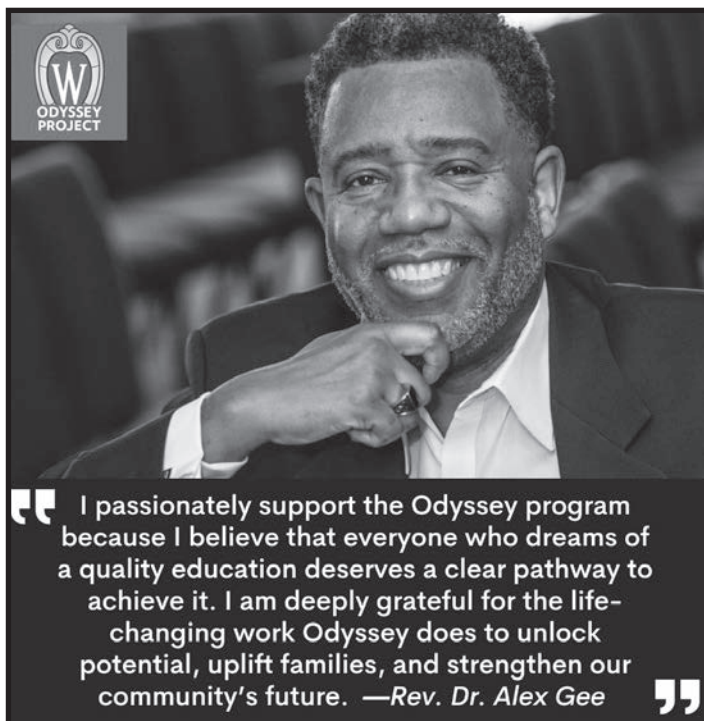
Bob Auerbach, Piano

WELCOMING AND CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

Emily Auerbach, Odyssey Executive Director

Kevin Mullen, Odyssey Director of
Adult Education

Rev. Dr. Alex Gee, Guest speaker



WINNER OF THE 2025 FRIEND OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT AWARD

Roberta 'Bobbie' Wang

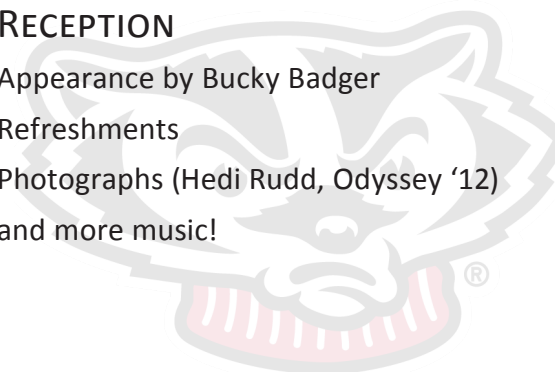
ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2025 PRESENTATIONS

RECEPTION

Appearance by Bucky Badger

Refreshments

Photographs (Hedi Rudd, Odyssey '12)
and more music!



Sponsors:



ODYSSEY GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2025



**ANGELICA ALVAREZ
VALENCIANO**

Good evening and pleasant greeting. *Bienvenidos y gracias por va ir.* I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to all the hard-working

staff at Odyssey. A special shoutout to Mr. Brian Benford for keeping me grounded on my gloomy and painful days. Thank you to Mrs. Emily, who really is a “pit bull” for those she loves. *Gracias*, Kevin, for the memorable conversations in class. Thank you, Odyssey students and staff, for your presence and existence. May peace and prosperity carry you to your dreams.

A very humble and graceful shoutout to my people at 6:30 am Sunrise. You have been the most heartwarming real gift I have ever received from God. May we see each other till the end of time.

Finalmente mi Madrecita querida y mi familia amada! Sin su amor y apoyo no se donde ni quien seria. Los amo de aqui a la luna!

Congratulations, Odyssey Class of 2025! Let’s rock on! Peace be the journey!

I’m glad I’ve gotten to share a laugh with every single one. Words cannot express my gratitude for those that have helped me get through everything this last year. You are so appreciated; never forget that. I’m hoping/telling myself this is the correct step in the right direction to move forward and earn a degree.

Thank you to everyone – I wish nothing but the best to my classmates, teachers, advisors, and supporters.



TIFFANY BRENSTON

Hey there, I’m so thankful to the MAN above for giving me strength to even sign up to join this program. Andrea Evans, Odyssey 2024, suggested I should sign-up, and as

you all can see I’m now a UW Odyssey graduate. I’m so thankful to Emily and all of the staff at Odyssey. I’ve been through so much since joining in September; now it’s May.

My classmates, my classmates—I will miss you all. Most importantly, I’m proud of myself for showing up and showing out, not only for myself but for my children and anyone that’s around me. The thing is, if I can do it, you can do it.



KYIANNA BAKER

I want to thank Emily, Kevin, Em, Sarah, and everyone who has supported me throughout this journey. I truly did not ever think I

would be sitting in a classroom again and turning in assignments. This program has helped me gain confidence in my ability to be in school and apply myself to get a degree. I am so incredibly thankful for getting the opportunity to experience a program like this! I have met so many great people, and

“The Odyssey Project helped my critical thinking and writing and made me want to pursue my education.”





QU'ANNA CAFFEY

I want to thank God for providing me a way to make it to every class, and I would like to thank Emily for everything, the support

and patience. I want to thank my grandmother (Annette Bland '06) for introducing our family to Emily, and I thank my mother (Tenishia Bland '15).

I'm so thankful for being able to achieve so much, have faith in myself, and know that anything is possible when you put your mind to it. I would like to thank the whole Odyssey team for all their support and hard work.

And thank you to my brother that's not here anymore but was the greatest supporter ever to me.

Thank you to the support around me. I'm very grateful for everyone that's been there supporting me through the difficult times so I could get to the end. Thank you to my family for making me want to achieve something so amazing.

Thank you, Odyssey.

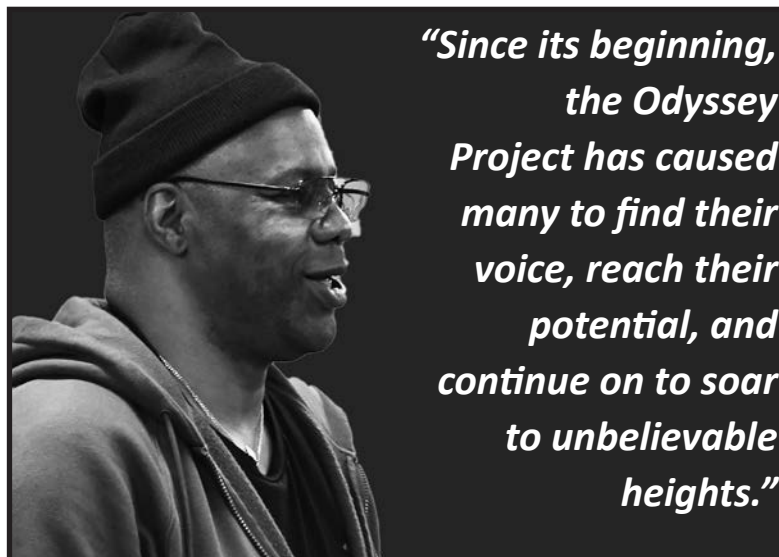


ELEANOR CEASER

First, I would like to start by saying thank you sooo much for Emily, her husband, and the whole Odyssey Program for giving me this great opportunity. I remember

like it was yesterday having the interview on the phone with Emily. I literally got on my knees and prayed that I would get chosen. Out of over 100 people, I was one of the 30 chosen. I got accepted, and I was so happy.

This is one of the best programs and opportunities ever in my life. This program gave me motivation to want more out of life than working 9-5 jobs, living paycheck to paycheck. I also have to shoutout Cierra Jackson (Odyssey '24) for telling me about



"Since its beginning, the Odyssey Project has caused many to find their voice, reach their potential, and continue on to soar to unbelievable heights."

this program!! I have seen major growth from the first day of school to now. I really look forward to continuing to grow with the Odyssey Program!!



TIMOTHY J. COMER

Ladies and gentlemen, first I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for blessing me to see this Odyssey through to the end. Struggling from the offset, I was very

concerned whether or not Emily picked the right person to become a student of the project. But Emily is a walking, living "I don't take no for an answer" ally. So, thank you, Emily, for the encouragement. Thank you, family and friends, for coming out and sharing in my Odyssey adventure!



DILLON DAHLK

Right off the bat, I'd like to thank all of the staff members involved with Odyssey. This truly is a one-of-a-kind, transformative program with so many moving pieces, and I

have a great appreciation for everyone that makes this beautiful thing happen. When I first started this Odyssey, I was possibly at my lowest. I was unsure of myself and ultimately where the heck life was going. With the incredible sense of support and community provided by the Odyssey team, I now see the world and myself in ways I never could have imagined.



GELA DOCKS

I want to thank Emily Auerbach and the entire Odyssey staff for their brilliance and awesome support throughout. I want to thank my cousin, classmate Tiffany

Brenston, for telling me about Odyssey and constantly reminding me to apply. I want to thank my family for supporting me in my decision to return to school.

I am proud to say I am a part of Odyssey 2025. I have learned many things that are valuable to me. I have opened my eyes to a new set of standards. I have been touched by many people I've met along this journey. I have been intrigued and motivated to do more. Thank you, Odyssey!



BRIANNA ESPAÑOL

I'd like to thank Boss Lady (Rebecca Barber) for giving me the push to better myself and not be a victim to my own situation and mind. She raised me to be a better person in

the last year than my own parents did in 22 years, and because of her I'm here. Because of Emily giving me a chance, I have succeeded and jumped

into the water. I'd also like to thank my aunties (Tia Pati and Titi Nancy) for never missing a holiday, a birthday, or a special moment; they were the ones there for me. There was a point when they were the only ones, and I continue to be good to myself for them.



ADRIANNE FARROW

This was the most amazing and eye-opening experience I have ever had. I am so thankful to the instructors and staff! It was so clear all year that they were here to help us in any and every way possible. Every time I came into class, it was like I was walking into a safe place where I could be open, honest, and myself. I love how this class lets me open my mind to all these new thoughts, ideas, and ways of learning.

I would also like to thank my amazing family! My family helped with any stressors that I may have had outside of school. They always had my back and supported everything this class required.

I appreciate this program for the thrust for knowledge it created in me. I am so happy to be back in school and finally feeling like I'm where I belong.



"This was the most amazing and eye-opening experience I have ever had. I am so thankful to the instructors and staff! It was so clear all year that they were here to help us in any and every way possible. Every time I came into class, it was like I was walking into a safe place where I could be open, honest, and myself."



JAMAL JACKSON

I want to start by expressing my deepest gratitude to the Odyssey staff, a team of extraordinary individuals who worked tirelessly to

empower us to reach new heights this year. They are compassionate and caring, genuinely invested in the success and well-being of each student in this program. They created a nurturing environment that made learning fun, engaging, and judgment-free.

Secondly, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my classmates for embracing my quirky personality and helping me stay focused. Even when you thought I wasn't paying attention, I was inspired by your collective efforts to grow and progress. We began our journey in silence, and then the sounds in the class resonated like fireworks. Thank you all.

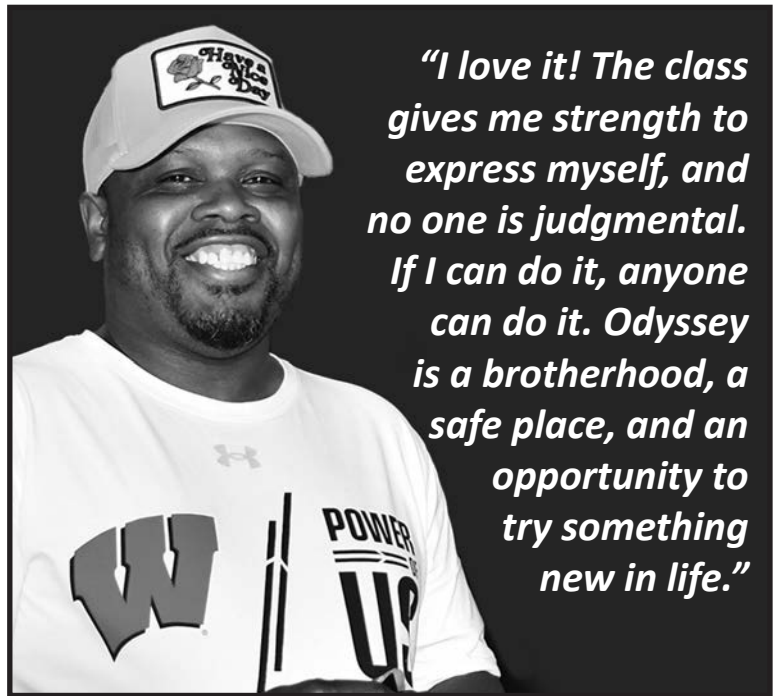


AANIYAH JEFFERSON

First, I would like to say, I MADE IT! Thank you, Emily, for staying consistent in motivating me and helping me through the process.

What you are doing for the community is a beautiful thing. Thank you to my family for supporting me in the way they have. Thank you to my partner for supporting me and pushing me to try when I don't feel like I have it in me. Thank you, Tai'Kiah Phillips (Odyssey '12), for telling me about this opportunity and taking the time to motivate me and help me see this was really something I could do. I wouldn't be here without you, so thank you.

Last but most certainly not least, a big thank you to little ole me for not giving up on myself when I felt I couldn't keep going—for pushing past the limits I had placed on myself and doing something I didn't think I would. I'm thankful for being here and being surrounded by others who have gone through this with me. Congrats, Class of 2025. We made it.



"I love it! The class gives me strength to express myself, and no one is judgmental. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Odyssey is a brotherhood, a safe place, and an opportunity to try something new in life."



GLORIA KNIGHT

First and foremost, I would like to thank Ms. Emily and all of Odyssey staff for not only this opportunity but also the constant love and support throughout these two

semesters. Secondly, I would like to thank the five human beings that not only call me "mom" but have been my reason to fight and strive to be an exceptional example to them. Everything I do, I do it with their feelings and lives in mind. Third, I would like to thank my friends who have not only supported me but have encouraged me through all the obstacles and doubt. Last but not least, I want to thank my mother, who has helped me grow to be the amazing woman and mother I am.

This journey has been so amazing and fulfilling that I am sad that this class is ending. Though this class will be ending, this is not the end, not by far. This is just the beginning of something far greater than I've ever seen or thought of. This has opened my mind and perception to so much more. So, to the Odyssey Class of 2025, I would like to say congrats to all my class, and this is not goodbye but see you later! We took this step, y'all, and made it through this. WE DID IT!!!

**CRYSTAL LEE**

I went through a lot during the time I was in this class and where I was before versus now. I'm grateful. Thank you to anyone who has been here to support me

through one of the hardest times. You are appreciated. <3

**MARIYA A. LUCAS**

I would like to start by giving a huge thank you to my sister Maleaha, for being here for me through whatever; she always believes in me. She's the one who

told me about the program and told me to apply. This program truly gave me hope for my future. I would also like to show gratitude to Emily for believing in me as well and for giving me the opportunity to be in the Class of 2025. I am extremely grateful for another shot at my education, and I am proud of all of my classmates as well.

**ALFUSAINEY MANJANG**

Grateful is the word!

That I get to be privileged with the

Odyssey program is one of my wildest dreams; and as such, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Almighty Allah for His numerous blessings. I'm also thankful to my wonderful mother and my lovely wife, Kiana, for introducing me to Odyssey. Kiana Sims (Odyssey '23) is a woman who has shown her love in almost all ways there are, and I'm beyond blessed to have her as my wife.

I am also appreciative of all the support shown by Emily, for providing me with the needed support and this incredible opportunity to learn alongside people from diverse backgrounds, religions, and cultures. I feel truly blessed to be part of this amazing class.

My sincere thanks also to the entire Odyssey staff for their warm hospitality and exceptional support. I'm grateful for the experience and looking forward to furthering my educational pursuits to the next level.

Thank you again for believing in me. I promise to return whenever the opportunity presents itself, for I intend to be better for me, my family, society, and the world at large. I'm forever proud and grateful.

**VANESSA J. MARTINEZ**

I would like to thank the entire Odyssey staff for their care and support for each and every student. The support they provided was truly helpful and

came from a genuine place. I want to thank my fiancé (Terance Nix '24) for pushing me to apply even though I was hesitant because it was out of my comfort zone. Through his experience, I realized

"Odyssey creates a platform for people to realize their potential, to believe in themselves, and to find a sense of belonging and community. Odyssey has been a life-changing adventure for me."



the interest I had in trying to better myself and pushing my limits and trying things I never thought I could or would be capable of.

I thank each class member for the nonjudgmental and supportive atmosphere in class. As a woman with extreme anxiety, I found it was almost painful to read and talk in front of a room full of strangers. In this class, you are encouraged to try and not be concerned with or worry about being judged. You will be proud of yourself for trying and realize you can absolutely do this and realize your true potential. Like Frida Kahlo said, at the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can. I enjoyed going through the Odyssey program with my daughter Alexis. Having her in class helped ease the anxiety of the unknown, and we supported each other to succeed.



ALEXUS MCCLAIN

I would like to thank the foundation, mother, and above all else the teacher of the Odyssey Project, Ms. Emily Auerbach, not just for investing her time and resources into me and my future but into humanity as a whole.

Have you ever heard the saying “no child gets left behind”? Well, Emily identified that adults too should not be left behind when it comes to anything related to education. With that said, I can’t forget to thank the word doctor, Kevin Mullen, for helping bring the thoughts in my head to life by transferring them to paper.



MICKEY ZARATE NAVARRETE

My parents left behind everything they knew for me to walk across a graduation stage. I am grateful that the Odyssey built a bridge that helped me return to education. I hope to build new bridges with the tools I acquire from Odyssey. We will all rise.



VALVREE MOSLEY

First, I would like to thank the whole Odyssey staff wholeheartedly. I would like to thank my mom for always being my #1 support system. Without you, I honestly don’t know where my kids and I would be or what we would do! Thank you for standing on business every Monday and

Wednesday for me to be able to complete my Odyssey. Thank you to my kids’ father for always pushing me and supporting me whether you are far or near, even while fighting your own storm. Thank you to my loving and supporting friends for being a listening ear helping me with my homework and all of you for the encouragement. I know I can be a crybaby!

Thanks, Odyssey, for this amazing odyssey. I hate that it has to come to an end. Also, thank you to my classmates of “25.” Keep in touch!





DAIJA PIGRAM

I would like to thank Emily for accepting me in the program; third time is the charm, haha!

The first time I wasn't ready. By last year I made sure to make time for my future. Thank you for pushing me to my limits and encouraging me every week. Thank you, Kevin, for believing I had what it takes to finish the program strong, helping me with my writing on days all I wanted to do was be in bed. For the people close to me, thank you for the words of wisdom and never giving up on me!



LAILAINI REED

I would like to thank my parents (Rachel and Reggie Reed, Odyssey '06) for always supporting me and motivating me. Also, thanks to my

grandparents for the same thing. My parents both graduated the Odyssey program, and I was in Odyssey Junior, and they both really encouraged me to apply. I want to thank my friends and sister who would study with me and just be around when I needed. I want to thank Emily, Kevin, Brian, and all of the other staff that were here to support. We've been given food, resources, and love. <3

The journey hasn't been easy, but it hasn't been hard either. I want to thank my classmates for feedback and ideas. I want to thank myself for being productive and caring about myself.



TIANA AMARI RICHMOND-LEE

To my daughters, Malani and Demi, you guys are my pride and joy and the reason I strive to be a better person every day. To Emily, thank you for the call you gave me

"Odyssey is a rainbow, reminding me that there is beauty and peace after the storm. Making me want to explore every opportunity the world has to offer. Giving me a sense of refreshment for my new journey."



on 6/8/24 @11:43 AM; that call changed my life forever and gave me the boost I needed to get back into college. Thank you for your kind words and believing in me since day one. To my Odyssey family, Class of 2025: I'm so happy I've met you all, and it's been such a nice time with you guys. I'll never forget the motivation and support y'all gave me. I wish you guys nothing but the best. Congrats, we made it!



ASHLI SMITH

First, I want to thank every staff member here at Odyssey for always being encouraging and supportive. I am so thankful to have been given the opportunity

to be a part of such a wonderful project. I have been encouraged by the many different stories of others who faced hardships but chose to make a change. It is a constant reminder to never settle or become complacent. Everyone has a story, and I am truly blessed that the Odyssey Project is part of mine. I will always remember how this class has helped me make a change for the better for my children and myself. <3



CORRIE THOMAS

Hello, everyone, and thank you for taking the time out of your day to be here. This is such an amazing moment and opportunity for each and every one of us. I want to give thanks to all of the staff and teachers in Odyssey; without each of you, I'm not sure where many of us would be. I am also not sure how I personally could have done it without you all.

Secondly, I would like to give thanks to my backbone, my go-to for most, my rock, my sister Amanda for introducing this life-changing program to me (Amanda von Behren, Odyssey '24). Without you pushing me to apply, I don't think I would have been going to school any time soon, but here I am succeeding and in school, focusing on myself and my goals. I am truly blessed to have you in my life to push me, love me, and help me grow. Thank you for showing me I have the strength to be better and get it done.

Last but not least, thank you to all of the donors, everyone who coordinated our field trips, the fundraisers, all of the knowledge, and this amazing journey.

I am now more confident in my work, more outspoken. I can see different views of all different people and things. I am more grateful for my knowledge and education. So, thank you a million times over, each and every one of you. Thank you, Class of 2025, for always making me feel comfortable. Thank you for not judging. Thank you for your laughs and most importantly thank you for being an ear.

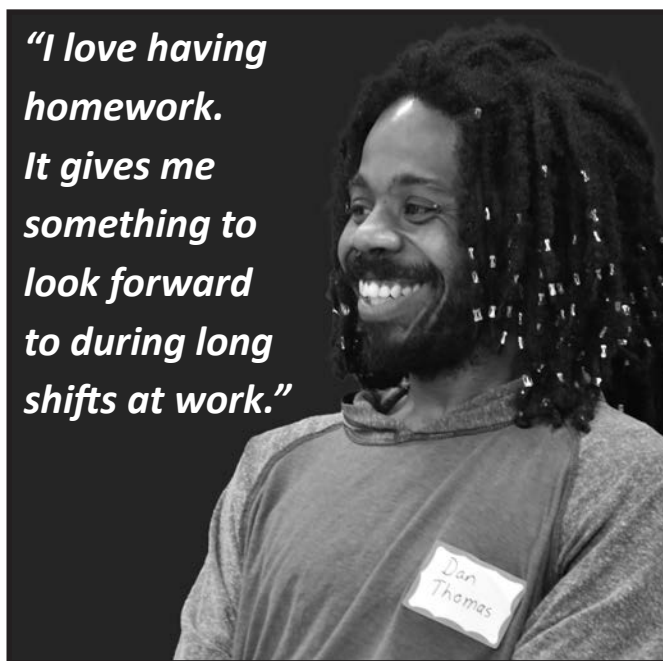


DAN MAURICE THOMAS JR.

"If you don't like your destiny, then don't accept it. Instead, have the courage to change it." – Naruto Uzumaki

Thank you, Ceci, Brandon, Brett, Brady, Brayah, Lauren, Brian, Kaitlyn, Gabriel, Kala, Mia, and Aaron.

"I love having homework. It gives me something to look forward to during long shifts at work."



Couldn't have done it without ya! We are one step closer.

"You don't become Hokage so that people will acknowledge you. You become Hokage because people have acknowledged you." – Naruto Uzumaki

Thank you to all of the Odyssey staff. You all have been uplifting and supportive. Thank you for the smiles. Thank you for listening. Thank you for your kindness. Thank you.

"I will finish the story!" – Cody Rhodes



JANESSA MARIE WEICHMANN

I would like to thank my children. Without them I wouldn't have the mindset to be here today with all I have accomplished. Secondly, to my mother, you are truly my rock.

Thank you for all you do and how you help me by creating a stable flow for your grandkids with all the picking up and dropping off. You push me to always stay focused, and you have my back. THANK YOU, Odyssey, for this amazing opportunity. Thank you for seeing something in me, creating a safe place for me and my classmates. I am lastly so thankful to all my friends who supported me even if it's just to listen. Thank you for all your love and support.

**ABBY WILSON**

First, I would like to thank Emily and the Odyssey staff for supporting my college journey. Next, I would like to thank my granny and papa (Yulanda and

Sanford Jones, Odyssey '10, Odyssey Senior, Odyssey Beyond Wars) for encouraging me to join Odyssey. When I first joined, I was super anxious and unsure of my decision, but as time went on I was happy that I did because it taught me to be confident and to believe in myself and my writing. I am glad I got this opportunity, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds!

**LADELLA WILSON**

I am very thankful for my family supporting me during this Odyssey! I personally want to thank my husband for supporting me and

always giving me words of encouragement and taking the time to quiz me when needed. I also want to shout out my dad. I appreciate him for always being there and encouraging me to sign up for the Odyssey Program and to also continue on with my education in hopes to get my nursing degree!

I definitely want to thank my amazing classmates for making this class a safe space. We have all grown so much since day one and shared so many laughs together. I pray that each and every one of us are successful in reaching our dreams.

Lastly, I want to express my sincere gratitude for Emily and the rest of the staff for this amazing opportunity. The work you all have done and continue to do is marvelous and truly appreciated. I pray that one day in life I can make a difference the way you all do!

**SABLE WRIGHT**

I would like to thank God first and foremost. I want to thank my daughter and grandkids, whom I mostly strive for, and my sister circle. And I would like to thank

Pastor Judge Everett Mitchell. I could go on and on with thanking people.

Most of all, I want to thank myself for believing in myself. I was scared when I first started, thinking hey, I am too old to be in here with all the young people. I said to myself if God brought you to it, He will bring you through it. So, I encourage myself every day.

I just want to thank the Odyssey program for picking me to be one of the thirty students and for bringing out the best inner me that I can be. Thanks, everyone.

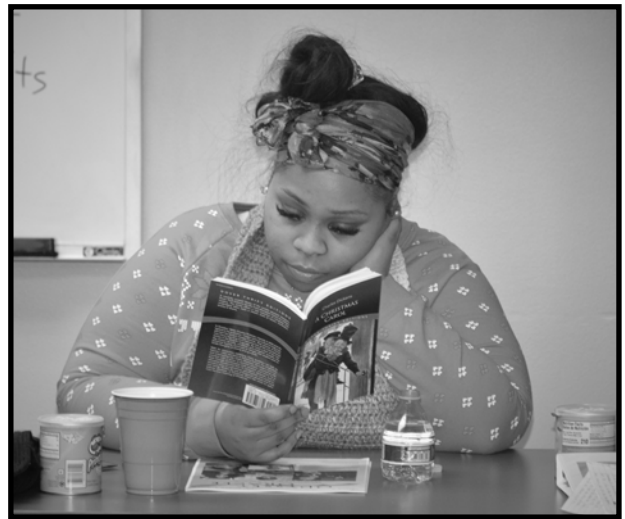
"I am WAY MORE confident than I was when I first started the class!"



ODYSSEY'S SIX PROGRAMS

ODYSSEY COURSE

Each year since 2003, 30 adults facing financial barriers embark on a transformational two-semester journey empowering them to overcome adversity and achieve dreams through higher education. All students receive free tuition, textbooks, materials, childcare, and dinner and are registered as UW-Madison special students. Through lively discussions of literature, philosophy, history, theatre, music, and art in a classroom in South Madison, Odyssey students not only gain six UW credits in English Literature but also acquire skills in writing, reading, and critical thinking, a stronger voice, and greater confidence in themselves and their futures.

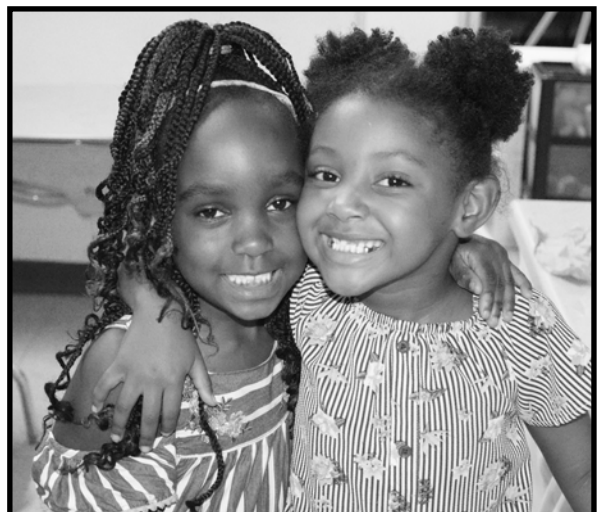


ONWARD ODYSSEY

If Odyssey helps to light a spark within students, Onward Odyssey feeds this flame through programming and wraparound services for its over 700 alumni. Odyssey supports its graduates through advising, tutoring, targeted courses, and financial resources as they pursue college degrees and other dreams. Onward Odyssey offers a supportive learning community that leverages the strong relationships that Odyssey Project alumni have with each other and with faculty and staff as they continue their education. Graduates of Odyssey have gone from homelessness to bachelor's and master's degrees; Onward Odyssey supports alumni both academically and personally throughout their journeys.

ODYSSEY JUNIOR

Through a weekly literacy and arts enrichment program for 50+ children and grandchildren of Odyssey students, Odyssey Junior gets the next generation excited about learning and more hopeful about their futures. While Odyssey adults attend class, their children and grandchildren participate in an enrichment program designed to develop their interest and confidence in self-discovery and expression through the arts, reading, writing, and speaking. Odyssey takes a multigenerational approach to learning, encouraging families to view all its members as "college bound" with gifts to unwrap. Odyssey Junior serves newborns through teenagers.





ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS

Odyssey Beyond Bars teaches life-changing credit-bearing and noncredit UW-Madison courses to students incarcerated in Wisconsin prisons. Students in prison improve their academic and communication skills, gain greater confidence and perspective, and receive academic and financial advising designed to help them succeed when they re-enter their communities. Like the community-based Odyssey courses, Odyssey Beyond Bars courses provide a newfound sense of hope and an on-ramp to higher education for adult learners. As Victor Hugo observed, “He who opens a school door closes a prison.”

ODYSSEY SENIOR

Odyssey Senior offers enrichment to Odyssey students 55 and older OR a 55-or-older relative (parent, grandparent, aunt, sibling, etc.) of an Odyssey student. This program offers a warm-hearted, encouraging way to capture the unique stories of Odyssey elders. Students create (via writing or speaking) individual stories, read brief samples from autobiographical writings by Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, and others, learn how to do oral history, interview each other, and publish an Odyssey Senior Oracle making history come alive.



ODYSSEY BEYOND WARS

Having launched in Fall 2023, Odyssey Beyond Wars serves veterans who might be challenged by their transition from military to civilian life, are looking for an engaged community of peers, and would like a jump start in furthering their education. All military veterans -- regardless of time in service, deployment history, disability status, or discharge status—are encouraged to apply. Graduates earn six transferable college credits in English at no cost and without using any VA benefits. This program, just completing its second year, will pause for strategic planning during the 2025-2026 academic year.

In addition to our six programs, we offer the **ODYSSEY FAMILY LEARNING CENTER** out at our South Madison Partnership Space, 2238 S. Park Street, with tutoring, music lessons, advising, child enrichment, and family activities. We depend on a whole team of tutors, volunteers, staff, partners, and donors to make our programs succeed. If you are interested in learning more about any of our six programs and the Family Learning Center, contact Emily Auerbach at emily.auerbach@wisc.edu or 608-262-3733.

LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2026

Dear Class of 2026:



Picture yourselves in a room filled with the most mysterious, charismatic, and loving women, men, and friends. Now, imagine yourself sitting in a room where your voice roars and slowly blossoms into a kaleidoscopic

flower; where stories become a vibrant song or sorrowful melody; a place where your family is safe and engaged in fun and creative learning activities. Odyssey's spirit is magnetic. Somewhere between reading William Blake's "Songs of Innocence" and Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman," each assignment gave poetic justice to my voice, melting my emotions into notions of hope, faith, courage, and sorrow, while rapt in grace.

Odyssey broke a generational curse in my spirit; a curse I believe to be self-imposed. Practicing self-oppressed tendencies of repressing my words, worth, and mirth nearly destroyed my faith. This curse kept my dreams and purpose hidden, like a meek flower in the spring; but every rose has its thorns, and I decided to sharpen them instead of cutting them. In class and through the assignments Mrs. Emily gave us, I was given the chance to write stories of love, pain, and untold melodies hidden within me.

I remember the night I started my "Self Portrait" assignment! The image in my mind was perfect and every detail in my canvas was intentional, which made me treasure Odyssey with sincerity. Odyssey has personally gifted me with curiosity to learn about everything and to write fearlessly. The truth I can share about my experience is through my writing and the work printed in the Odyssey Oracle. The love you will receive is humble and genuine. It was an honor and privilege to be part of the graduating class of 2025, and I will honor the memories. Where do you picture yourself in May 2026? Not sure? Good. That's Odyssey.

(Angelica Alvarez Valenciano)



This is the time to look within yourself and say, "I can do it!" I first walked into this program thinking I couldn't do it and I wouldn't finish. I had no idea who any of these people were, and it was very off putting, but I knew

we were all here for the same thing—to better ourselves. No matter what you are going through, your classmates, teachers, advisors, whoever, will be there to support you! Open up and let them in. Everyone in this program is truly kindhearted, and they just want what is best for you. Be grateful that you have this opportunity because there is someone else who would love to be in this position. They gave you an inch and you take the mile—to your success.

I want to thank Emily, Kevin, Christine, Brian, and more. They were so understanding and supportive through the whole process, such great people. I have made the best memories, and Wednesday nights are always something I look forward to. My classmates are amazing, and I love every different perspective. We all opened up and created great friendships throughout this program. Take a breath, look at everyone, and take it in. They are strangers now, but they will be your family by the end of the year. **YOU CAN DO IT! Best of luck! (Kyianna Baker)**



Hi you, smile. Everything you're feeling I've felt. This will be a very special time in your life. So just relax and smell the newness—your books, pens, backpacks, laptops, and of course all the friendly staff. Even if you're going through a sad day or not so good start of the week, please come to class because you will for sure have so much fun learning. It's so intriguing. You will love your lessons, homework even. All I can say is you got this, and if you need a friend, I'm near—as is everyone at Odyssey. Now let's go!!! **(Tiffany Brenston)**



Hello, Class of 2026! First off, I want to say congratulations. This Odyssey course has been such an amazing and remarkable moment in my life. I have been involved with Odyssey since I was a teenager in Odyssey Junior. With

all the amazing people you'll meet, you will create a forever family.

What I have learned from Odyssey is so unforgettable, with all the different stories we've read and written about. We have learned about all these people that are legends until this day, still being talked about. Odyssey is a course that will

teach you that your life struggles are just temporary. If you put one foot in front of the other and believe in yourself, it will be possible. No matter what is going on in your life, stay focused.

It's an opportunity to make changes in your life and really get you to know your dreams and how to start chasing them. What is important in your life is the moment and the people around you.

I've been through so much trial and tribulation in life physically and mentally. With perseverance, I was able to achieve what I thought I wasn't capable of. It's the discipline and focus to get to success and a brighter future. I want to be a great role model for my children, my siblings, and my family. Believe in yourself and pray about all your struggles and anything you're going through. Talk to God about it.

Use the help that Odyssey provides to get your homework done.

Look forward to going to class and seeing Professor Emily and all the different people involved in Odyssey. Odyssey is an amazing team of all different people, and you will meet new people from different backgrounds.

You got this! Do your best in this. It's definitely worth it. Stay blessed. **(Qu'Anna Caffey)**





Heyyyyyyyy, Class of 2026!!!!!!
Welcome to the start of a new beginning and your way to a brighter future. I want to start by saying heyyyy, I'm Eleanor Ceaser. I'm ending this class strong, and wanting to continue to grow with the Odyssey Program is that fire!

Be very happy that you got chosen to be a part of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I mean they make it SOOO hard for us not to be able to succeed! Special thanks to Emily and her husband for getting this program started and focusing on minorities and on less fortunate people who have great ideas and futures that, with a little help, will get them soaring to the sky with the goals they are knocking down. This is the place where you can stop and say, "Thank you so much, God, for letting me get chosen for this opportunity."

Really, I remember the day like it was yesterday, getting that phone call from Emily and being sooooo happy that I got chosen! It really made me feel special and like God was saying, "Here, Ellie, this is the time to invest in yourself. Go make me proud." I was jumping, screaming, and literally tears



came to my eyes knowing I got accepted. I kept hearing nothing but amazing things about this program, and I was soo happy I took the chance! I took this opportunity and did the very best that I could. I showed up every day and never missed a day to engage, do homework, come to tutoring—you're going to succeed! So go ahead and scream, jump, and yell—this is a great opportunity. It changes my mood, and I am happy to say, "I can't go—I got school. I have to do homework. I'm getting ready for my graduation." Just like, wow—Eleanor, this program is one of the best opportunities I have had!

Remember there is no wrong answer, and if you are going through something don't hesitate to talk to the wonderful staff. I know people just say, "Hey, I'm here for you if you need anything," but this group of teachers really means that. If there's something that is stopping you from coming to school, they will help if they can. Do not hesitate to go to the tutoring every Monday—it comes with food and child care, and I would say take advantage of it and go every chance you get, especially with the homework you feel you're not really getting. Come in on Monday and they will help you with it. Just show up to class every Wednesday with good energy and participate and you will not fail!!!
WELCOME, CLASS 2026!!!! BE NICE TO MY STAFF, OKAY!!!!!! **(Eleanor Ceaser)**



If you are reading this letter, it is because you are now sitting in the seat I sat in a year ago. Welcome! Welcome to the journey, the adventure, the Odyssey Project! Feeling nervous? So did I...but don't worry, the class sessions come alive

with stimulating activities and brilliant professors and alumni guest speakers! One thing I can guarantee, especially if you are sitting in the seat I sat in – your heart will become enlightened, you will be inspired to grow more. You will catch the Odyssey fever! So, sit tight, have a bite, enjoy the night, and know that everything will be alright!

Congratulations! And here's a toast to your success and prosperity moving forward! **(Timothy Comer)**



What's up, Odyssey Class of 2026? Welcome!!

First off, I'd like to recognize and celebrate each one of you for deciding to dive back into your education and commit to the idea of self-growth. People love to talk about how they're gonna do this, or gonna do that-- but here you are taking action, which shows tremendous courage. I know things might seem intimidating and a bit overwhelming (especially on this first day), but trust that inner voice that led you here. Remember that you were hand selected from over a hundred applicants for this one-of-a-kind opportunity! I promise you're on the right path.

It might sound a little cliché, but it honestly feels like just the other day I was sitting in one of those chairs on the first day of class, feeling that mix of uncertainty and excitement, reading over the encouraging letters that the Class of 2024 had written us. And now here I am a few weeks away from our graduation ceremony and feeling sad that the year is almost over. I also am feeling incredibly grateful for everything Odyssey has done/ continues to do. As I revisited the class of 2024 letters, I noticed a really strong sense of connection that wasn't particularly there at the beginning of the year. I now grasp the weight and sincerity of each one of those letters because that's exactly how I'm feeling with the year about to wrap up. In no time it'll be spring of 2026, and I genuinely believe you'll be feeling what I am right now—a sense of appreciation and warmth that stems from the spirit of what this program truly is, along with all the amazing people who make it possible.

Odyssey redefines the sense of what a community can really be, and I'm excited for each one of you to experience it. Welcome to the Fam, Class of '26!!
(Dillon Dahlk)



I joined the Odyssey Class of 2025 as a mother of six and a grandmother of two. I graduated high school over 25 years ago. I had no idea what Odyssey would be like for me. I was nervous about going back to school, but I'm so happy that I did! Odyssey has opened my mind to endless possibilities that I had lost interest in. I am reenergized and optimistic. I want more. I have an overload of ideas again, and my future is bright and clear. I would suggest Odyssey to anyone looking to further their educational career or anyone looking for a fresh start in life. I am very grateful to have had this experience. I wish you all the best on your future endeavors. **(Gela Docks)**



All things, good things told and spread about the Odyssey Project are true. Your life will change; you yourself and your mind will expand. Everyone involved in the program—the teachers, students, and everyone up, down, and around—want nothing more than for you to transform into something, someone successful. I will say also release yourself in your writing. If you're a single mom, homeless, just got out, no matter your background, tell your story! **(Brianna Español)**



When I walked into this room, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I came with an open mind and an open heart, and from that moment on everything I needed to do was made clear. The road I traveled wasn't easy!

Sometimes I was dead dog tired. Sometimes work felt like too much, and sometimes I couldn't tell if I was coming or going, but one thing was certain—if I kept showing up, if I kept asking for help, if I kept being vulnerable and honest, I was going to make it to my goal.

No matter what happens, show up to class. When I showed up, I slowly formed a family with my classmates. When I showed up to tutoring, I always left with a smile and feeling lighter. School became my safe space, a place where I could come and truly be me, a place where others uplift me and where I get to help uplift others. This was a place where I have a solid support system of amazing teachers and counselors who would help me with anything.

If you don't take anything else from this letter, please take this: all you have to do is show up and be the most authentic version of yourself. Reach out when you're struggling and work as hard as you can. This class is transformative if you let it be. By the end of this class, you won't believe how amazing and talented you truly are! Rock it out, Class of 2026! **(Adrienne Farrow)**



This class is the best. When I first signed up, I was hoping I wouldn't get picked and was very nervous. After the first class, I was locked in, ready to learn and see

what this class had to offer. The teachers in this class will push you, motivate you, and want you to succeed. From Zoom to the room, it's just one big family where everyone is a teacher and student. **(Jamal Jackson)**



I was once in the same position as you are now—unsure of what to expect, and not knowing if I'd really be able to challenge myself in this way. Believe me when I say it really was a challenge, but it's the most rewarding journey.

Throughout the next two semesters, your thoughts and opinions will be questioned and revised, and you will be pushed to new limits.

For me the most challenging part was making the time to get things done. In between life's problems and pain, I found it difficult to find the importance of completing my school projects because of my own life and mental health.

The best advice I can give you to succeed is just to keep showing up. Your dreams are worth nourishing; your goals are worth pursuing. The last thing I'd like to say is make the most of your time with the people around you, and don't be afraid to speak up and say your piece. I assure you most of everyone around you is just as anxious as you may be. You are all in this space together. I don't know you, but I am proud of you. Congratulations for getting into Odyssey! I wish you the best in your journey. XOXO **(Aaniyah Jefferson)**





First and foremost, let me congratulate you on getting into Odyssey! You are about to embark on one of the most exciting journeys in your life. As someone who has recently stood in your shoes, I want to take a moment to

encourage you and inspire you as you prepare for this chapter. Through this chapter, life will test you, throw curve balls, and even make you feel that it is pushing you past your breaking point, but as hard as things can get, whatever you do, don't GIVE UP. Odyssey is filled with moments that will not only challenge your mind and perception but will also shape you in a more positive angle.

There will be nights of lack of motivation to complete homework, moments of doubt, and even times where the pressure feels overwhelming, but remember this—every challenge you face is an opportunity to grow. Keep pushing forward, believe in yourself, and never ever lose sight of your dreams. Some of your classmates will become everlasting friends, and make sure you cherish those friendships. Take advantage of every opportunity, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. The world is full of endless possibilities, and Odyssey will open that door for those possibilities and maximize your full potential.

I am telling you that whatever you do, work hard, stay focused, and do not be afraid to reach out and

lean on staff for support. Ms. Emily, Mr. Kevin, Mr. Brian, Ms. Christine, and all staff are all amazing and so helpful. Thinking about the love and support they provide almost brings me to tears. So, with that being said, embrace every moment. The memories that you create now will stay with you forever. And at the end at graduation, take pride knowing that you worked hard and earned every bit of the success that is coming your way.

Wishing you all the best on this journey ahead.
YOU GOT THIS!! (Gloria Knight)



Be patient with yourself and understand everything doesn't have to be perfect, but it will slowly come together. When I first started, I thought one day a week would be so easy—easy to keep up, everything would be turned in

on time, making it to every class would be just a walk in the park, and in the beginning it was. Once my personal life started to get to me, school got hard, but the best part is I never gave up. I was able to come to anyone on the staff for help, and every time they delivered and helped the best way they could, and I couldn't be more grateful!

This was my test, and I plan to go into fulltime classes. The effort I put in to make sure even if I was late the work was done shows me everything I need to continue my journey. It's important to keep

pushing and never give up because the benefits and the feelings are awesome! To know I'm about to walk across the stage while my family is watching me is the best feeling ever and will push me to want to do it again and again. I am here to tell you as someone who absolutely hated school, this was rewarding! The knowledge, the people, the love, the food, the energy, and the hard-working teachers and tutors are honestly people you don't want to miss in your life. Please take this opportunity to put your best foot forward and understand there is so much more to life. This is just the beginning. **(Crystal Lee)**





Welcome to Odyssey! Congratulations on being accepted and taking your first step to further your education. You may be nervous sitting here on your first day, but trust me there is nothing to worry about. Emily is the best. She will be there for you every step of the way! I can honestly say Odyssey was life changing and helpful in sooo many ways. I'll never be able to thank Emily enough for giving me this wonderful opportunity. In this class your voice will be heard, you'll make many new connections, and you will be tested. So buckle up and get ready to turn your thinking cap on. You've got this!

(Mariya Lucas)



With fulfillment and a heart filled with gratitude to Odyssey, I write to welcome you with a sense of responsibility and as a means of giving back. This program is not an insurmountable barrier giving its demands; it sure tests your

resilience, but let it! For it takes commitment and determination to weather the storm of the program, but an assurance would be that it will all be worth it in the end. This I have come to know, and as such I'm grateful for who I've become thus far. It's your time to shine! **(Alfusainey Manjang)**



Let me start out by saying congratulations—not only for being admitted into the Odyssey Project but also for taking the time to invest in yourself. With that said, throughout this course be open to anything and everything.

With the endless amount of confusion, anxiety attacks, tears, headaches, and life problems that you may endure, **STILL SHOW UP**. Lastly, good luck on any future endeavors and make sure you continue to **SHOW UP FOR YOURSELF** today, tomorrow, and every day! **(Alexis McClain)**



You are worthy and deserving. Don't second guess your decision to join the Odyssey experience. For some of us, myself included, joining was out of my comfort zone. Whether you are shy, have anxiety, or are uncomfortable in

social situations, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone is necessary. In this situation it was definitely worth every minor discomfort. You will definitely gain the confidence and courage to further your educational interests. Congratulations! "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." — Frederick Douglass **(Vanessa Martinez)**



Congratulations on your new journey. This educational program perhaps marks the beginning of institutional education reparations for you. If you are in the Odyssey project, the education system has likely failed you. The more you

learn, the clearer it will become that you deserve everything Odyssey offers. Your education with Odyssey is not a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; we must come together to create more reparations. Once your head is above water and your feet reach the land, look into the water and extend your hands. **(Mickey Mestiza)**



Last year in September, I was sitting in this exact class, which kind of felt like being surrounded by a bunch of strangers that I must admit is my family now. I will say I was kind of nervous. I did not really know what to expect for

real, or what I was getting myself into, but I did know that I wanted more and was open to different things than what I was used to. Taking this class did just that for me. Come with an open mind to learn and be willing to take advantage of everything the class has to offer.

The work started off a breeze for me, and then it kind of got a little rough, but remember there's nothing you can't get through. Whether you're stuck or just want to get out, please come out to tutoring. It's so great—they make it impossible to not be able to understand the homework, or what you are reading. Even if you don't have your homework, come to class! Here at Odyssey, you're in great hands, like Allstate, lol. No seriously, every single person here at Odyssey is great. Good luck, Class of 2026, you guys got this. **(Valvree Mosely)**



This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Take a moment to congratulate yourself for taking the initiative for starting the program. Embrace it! Sometimes we raise the bar so fast, moving on to the next milestone or

achievement. Slow down and enjoy the now. The most rewarding thing from being in Odyssey is being present, to fully experience what's happening now—not yesterday or a week from now. Before you know it, you'll be exactly where you're meant to be. Ease your mind and enjoy the ride. **(Daija Pigram)**



Welcome to the Odyssey class! This is going to be an amazing journey. Attending this class, you can't do anything but grow. You will learn skills and improve your confidence.

In the beginning of class, I had a lot of hurdles to jump over, and most people do. That's normal. Everybody around is truly happy to help and encourage you in the best way possible.

I've fallen behind due to work and personal life issues and I've felt discouraged, but there was no reason to feel that way. Lean on the support from staff and peers! Through all the battles I'm glad I didn't quit and I stuck it out. I'm very happy to be the second generation in my family to graduate. I was even in Odyssey Junior, which is also an amazing benefit for parents.

Enjoy your time and pay attention! **(Lailaini Reed)**





Be happy, be proud, and be loud! Out of 100 applicants you were the chosen one! I am so happy to congratulate you and welcome you to one of the best journeys of your life. Odyssey can be very overwhelming and scary honestly, but I have faith in the 30 of you. You will overcome those emotions and beat the odds. I was in your shoes just a few months ago, and now I am graduating from Odyssey. You will meet amazing people, and the friendships and bonds you make will make you such an amazing person. There's so much support around you. Take advantage of it and never lose hope...I wish you nothing but best, Class of 2026. **(Tiana Richmond-Lee)**



Welcome to Odyssey! This class will for sure be one of the best journeys yet. Be proud of yourself for making it to the seat that you're sitting in now. If I could give you some good advice, it would be show up to class no matter what!

Even without homework, your course reader, or even a pen – show up! Take this from someone who faced one of the biggest hardships in life while trying to complete the second semester. Take advantage of the wonderful staff and all of their knowledge. They truly want you to succeed. Time is going to fly, so make sure you give your all and try your best. It will be VERY worth it in the end! **(Ashli Smith)**



Congratulations and welcome, Class of 2026. I am so blessed to be able to sit in this spot and write to yet another Odyssey class. I want to

celebrate you and your acceptance into the award-winning UW-Madison Odyssey Project! This is not just an academic achievement—this is a triumph of perseverance, courage, and resilience.

You have overcome challenges that would have stopped many in their tracks. You've faced life's storms, health struggles, losses, job changes, and the weight of starting over, but through it all, you never gave up. You kept going, and now here you are, stepping boldly into a room and program designed to elevate voices like yours, to ignite change through education, and to open doors you were always meant to walk through.

This moment is more than a milestone: it's a reminder of your strength, your purpose, and your unstoppable spirit. The Odyssey Project welcomes you and is lucky to have you, just as you are lucky to have them.

As you begin this next chapter, hold your head high, and remember they are here to help you succeed. Take advantage of this amazing opportunity. You are walking proof that hard roads lead to powerful places. You've earned this. You got this!

So, take a deep breath, soak it all in, and know this: you are not just a part of the Odyssey Project. You are the very reason it can continue to exist. Have fun, be a sponge, and ask questions. Congrats, friends! **(Corrie Thomas)**





First off, I'd like to congratulate you on your acceptance in the UW Odyssey program. You may be thinking, "This is the stroke of luck I've been waiting

for." Assure yourself that this isn't a matter of luck or lottery. You were hand chosen by a group of individuals that see the potential you carry and the many things you can achieve. Thanks to the amazing staff, I can say that I am on the right track to establishing the collegiate career I've always dreamed about. "If only I had the opportunity to." Well, now is that opportunity.

Here are a few pieces of advice that I feel may help you along the way.

1. You haven't been in school for a while now, so there will be an adjustment period. Starting school doesn't mean the world around you stops. It is ultimately up to you to integrate school, work, and home life into one cohesive unit. I suggest finding a routine that allows you to balance all three while leaving some time for yourself. Recovering from winter break will be a slog. Give yourself a day or two before returning to class to get back in your groove.

2. There will be a plethora of opportunities to get out and experience things you may have never paid any attention to, or that you ever thought you'd enjoy. Take the free opera tickets. Go to the orchestra. Sit in on the public readings. This is your chance to learn outside of the classroom, as well as to rub elbows with some big names.

3. In my opinion, the hardest part of our curriculum was anything that involved me talking or writing about myself. I felt as though I knew everything there was to know about "Me," but often I found myself discovering something new about myself or confronting things that I assumed were long behind me. With that being said, I think it is important that you embrace all emotions you may encounter, be



they your own or the outpouring from your new friends... I mean classmates. This is a class that teaches more than what can be found in your course reader.

4. Don't freak out. These are kind, understanding people that are willing to help with your best interest at heart. You're in good hands. But do your work 'cause Mrs. Emily will get'cha!

I look forward to seeing y'all in the halls of our little home... I mean campus. Feel free to say, "What's up!" Again congratulations. You're a Badger now. "Yuh dun did good!" **(Dan Thomas)**



Welcome to the family. I know you're feeling nervous and wondering about your place in all this. I'm sure this is your first step into finding your path towards success. But I am here to assure you that you have nothing to

worry about. The people you are about to meet are some of the best humans you're ever going to come close to. This is a safe space, and these people care about you. They have your back. They want to see you win. I promise from now until next May, you will be filled with love and support. Step out of your comfort zone and open up. Put your all into your work and the people around you. Good luck, be great, and keep going!!!

(Janessa Weichmann)



Welcome to Odyssey. You may feel anxious or scared, but that's okay. I know that feeling. Over time, you learn that this is a safe place where we all come to learn and talk about Plato, or a poet named William Blake. You will read Martin

Luther King's letter (which I never knew was so long until I took this class). You will learn about Frederick Douglass, grammar, and words that sound the same but are different. You'll also learn how to dig even deeper and find the meaning of things. You learn a whole lot—not just from the readings but from the people around you. Odyssey is most definitely a journey that I am very glad I went on.

If I had to give a piece of advice, it would be: Don't give up, no matter how hard it gets. You have a lot of people within Odyssey who are on your team and who will support you in whatever you need. It is a lot of work, and it takes time, but it is worth it—you learn a lot, and you meet a lot of people.

Anyways, good luck! I believe in you. You GOT THIS, Class of 2026!!! **(Abby Wilson)**



I know some of you might be extremely nervous right now, looking around the classroom seeing so many unfamiliar faces and some that might be familiar! Please do not fret...you soon will become so comfortable with

your classmates and your teacher and all of the staff. Please throw yourself into this journey. Everyone is so willing to help, listen, give advice, etc. Soon you will be looking forward to Wednesday nights.

Odyssey was nothing shy of a blessing for me, and I'm sure you will be saying the same by the end of your Odyssey! Use this program as a stepping stone if you have other goals for your education. I hope you get the full experience. Ask questions, embrace everything, and you will be just fine! Welcome to the beginning of this chapter. **(Ladella Wilson)**



I am 61 years old, will be 62 May 13th. When I first started this class, I thought I was more nervous because of my age. But when we started the first day of school 9/4/24, I didn't know if I should be in this class. It was like they were

going to laugh at me. I am too old to be here with the younger people in the class. But I was determined to make this class. I studied hard and went to tutoring every Monday because I wasn't going to be laughed at at my age. But what I have come to learn is that no one is judging you or making fun of you. Everyone makes you feel like family, and we all work together. Emily and Kevin make sure no one fails. All you have to do is come to class, show up no matter what, and you will get it. If I can make it with no blood flow on the right side of my brain, I know without a doubt you will make it.

So, with that being said, welcome to the Class of 2026. I pray you guys pay close attention and get involved in the class. Always participate in class and even in tutoring class.

Good luck, God bless, and congratulations, Class of 2026. **(Sable Wright)**



MEET THE ODYSSEY TEAM FOR 2024-2025

ODYSSEY PROJECT AND ONWARD ODYSSEY

Executive Director: Professor Emily Auerbach

Director of Adult Education: Professor Kevin Mullen

Program Manager: Emily 'Em' Azad

Odyssey Assistant Program and Development Manager:
Sarah Lensmire

Odyssey Coordinator: Katie Arredondo

Odyssey Success Coach: Brian Benford Odyssey '07, UW MSW



Odyssey Therapy Dog: Duke Ellington

Odyssey Navigator: Christine Ellen Cina

Director of Development & Community Partnerships: Jenny Pressman

Budget Manager: Roberta 'Bobbie' Wang / Ben Garrison

Odyssey Ambassador: Char Braxton '06

Oracle and Yearbook Designer: Beth Auerbach

Photography: Katie Arredondo, Emily 'Em' Azad,
Gwendolyn Coale, Sarah Lensmire, Kevin Mullen,
Hedi Rudd '12

Odyssey Teaching Faculty: Nidia Bañuelos, Erin Celello, Christy Clark-Pujara, Jean Feraca, Baron Kelly, Gene Phillips, Ben Shannon, Craig Werner

Odyssey Guests: Keena Atkinson '10, Bob Auerbach, David Auerbach, Bill Banfield, Joe Loehnis,
Andre Myers, Patrice Rushen,
Rene Robinson '08

Onward Odyssey Guests: Eliot Finkelstein,
Jamie Henke, Jamal Jones, Sarah Karlson,
Alfonso Morales, Sue Robinson, Hedi Rudd
'12

Odyssey Interns and Student Hourly Helpers:
Jonny Escobar, Eliza Tool, Megan Wiertzema

Odyssey Facilities: Brenda González (Director
of Community-University Engagement),
Tanika Apaloo (Assistant Director), Michelle
Mack '22 (Coordinator), Brenden Many
(Administrative Assistant), UW-South
Madison Partnership



Field Placement Students, UW School of Social Work:
Krista Mellott '20, Max Andrews

Volunteer Tutors: Kate Bergum, Chuck Czuprynski,
Anna Yu Gaul, Adam Ghouse, Erin Gold, Dan Gorman,
Elise Gurney, Colin Hemme, Stanley Jackson, Lauren
Kersten, Seleata McDonald, Nancy Nemec-Griffin, Ella
Peterson, Carol Poore, Carly Pschorr, Jen Rubin, Jenn
Sauer, Tori Tiso, Seth Umbaugh, Jacy Whitehead

Arts Partners: American Players Theatre, Chazen
Museum of Art, Madison Opera, University Theatre,
& Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra



ODYSSEY JUNIOR

Director: Karen Dreyfuss

Odyssey Junior Coordinator: Gwendolyn Coale

Odyssey Junior Teaching Staff: Keena Atkinson ('10), Amy Basel, Angie Bazan, Ellie Breitfeld, Ron Buford ('20), Leigh Button, Carolina Diaz, Cecilia Enriquez, Jerome Flowers, K'Shawn Gibbs (Jr grad), Karla Holguin, Latrice Johnson, Cassie Lee, Talina Lopez Ruiz, Deshawn McKinney, Yatziri Ortega, Zawadi Ozulamoi (Jr grad), Aanika Parikh, Sahira Rocillo ('15), Amber Scarborough, KaBao Thao, Anna Uriostegui (Jr grad), Patricia Vera, Haley Weaver, Amanda Willis ('23)

Odyssey Junior volunteers, tutors, partners, and guests: Terrence Adeyanju, Chris Carcano (Jr grad), Doctors Ought to Care – UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, Drum Power (Yorel Lashley), Jonny Escobar, Go Team Therapy Dogs, Goodman South Madison Library (Rachel Lavender), Brenna Kelley, Literally Arts (Jamie Henke and Hailey Love), Riley Lynch, Madison Circus Space (Hildy Bee), Madison Reading Project, Operation Fresh Start (Jasmine Banks, '13), Aanika Parikh, Baptiste Paul, Ava Radeke, Emma Reger, India Roopnarine, Prisma Ruacho, Lyn Tschanz, UW-Madison Dept of Kinesiology (Morgan Shields), UW-Madison Multicultural Student Center, UW-Madison School of Music (Leo Arturo Quintero, Carrie Backman, Audrey Ferrero, Jeanne Hammes, Jane Krasovich, Ricky Medina), UW-Madison Space Place (Kay Kreiwald, Jim Lattis), Chris Wagner, Aubri Werk, Becky Wheeler, Wisconsin Book Festival (Jane Rotanda)



ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS

Director: Peter Moreno

Associate Director: Jennifer Fandel

Academic Program Manager: Taylor Kirby

Program Coordinator: Rachel Ritacco

Instructors/guest lecturers: Jean Feraca with Jerry Hancock, Emily Auerbach, Anne Durst, Jennifer Fandel, Kevin Mullen, Dana Oswald, Rosemary Russ, Ben Shannon, Craig Werner



Volunteer Tutors and Storytelling Coaches: Gunce Derin, Anne Durst, Jaime Edwards, Jen Fandel, Nestor Gomez, Jimmy Gutierrez, Danielle Hairston-Green, Jade Iseri-Ramos, Susan Kaye, Megan Kennedy, Taylor Kirby, Noelle Mariano, Josh Mayers, Ali Muldrow, Brendon Panke, Christine Pribbenow, Karen Redfield, Jen Rubin, Lilly Trkla, Seth Umbaugh, Kevin Willmott II

Academic and Financial Aid Advisors: Karen Ripley, Martin Rouse, Sarah Stilp

Thanks to all who made it possible for us to offer courses at Oakhill, Columbia, Racine, and Taycheedah Correctional Institutions this year.

ODYSSEY BEYOND WARS

Director: Erin Celello

Odyssey Beyond Wars Guests: Will Brockliss (CHE), Charles Konsitzke (UW MIA project), Sarah Marty (Four Seasons Theater), Molly Harris (UW-Madison), Doug Bradley, Craig Werner, Nancy Smith Watson (Feast of Crispian), Sam White (Feast of Crispian), Dan Grupe (Center for Healthy Minds), Brendon Panke (The Moth, Madison), Scott Schultz (The Heartbeat Center for Writing, Literacy and the Arts)

ODYSSEY SENIOR

Instructor: Emily Auerbach

Guests: Erin Celello, Jean Feraca, Kevin Mullen, Craig Werner



DIVISION OF CONTINUING STUDIES

Jeffrey Russell (Dean & Vice
Provost of Lifelong Learning)

Hope Simon (Associate Dean
of Administration and
Finance, Budget & Financial
Reporting, Human Resources
& Payroll)

Colleen Johnson (Director of
Development & Business
Engagement)

Andy Richardson (Assistant
Director of Administration &
Finance, Budget & Financial Reporting, Business Services & Operations)

Integrated Marketing Communications Team



FRIENDS OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT, INC.

Board of Directors

Alison TenBruggencate (President)

Don Miner (Treasurer)

Christy Clark-Pujara

Jean Feraca (Odyssey Co-Founder)

Brenda González

René Robinson '08 (Secretary)

Theodore Widder, III

Executive Director

Emily Auerbach

Advisors

Emily 'Em' Azad

Ben Garrison

Colleen Johnson

Jenny Pressman

Kelly Teelin



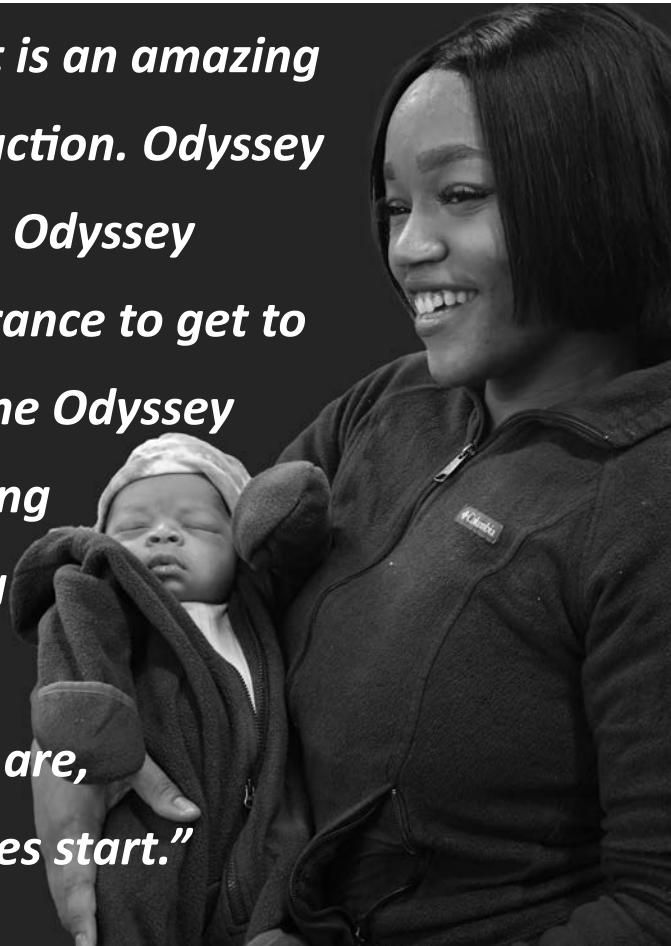
We will be sharing an expanded version of this Oracle next month thanking our hundreds of individual donors, community partners, and contributing foundations, businesses, and organizations.

JOIN THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT

To be eligible for the Odyssey Project, you need to:

- be at least 18 years old
- have a high school degree, G.E.D., or H.S.E.D. prior to June 1, 2025
- have financial need (income near the federal poverty level)
- possess the ability to read challenging books in English
- make a commitment to attend classes regularly

“The Odyssey Project is an amazing opportunity to take action. Odyssey is a family and more. Odyssey teaches you perseverance to get to your full potential. The Odyssey Project starts your long adventure to figuring out what you really want to do, who you are, and where your stories start.”



Email Emily Auerbach at emily.auerbach@wisc.edu with questions or for an application or apply online at www.odyssey.wisc.edu/apply/.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT

Odyssey changes lives. The following accounts enable us to help Odyssey students, graduates, and families with both their educational and personal expenses.

THE ODYSSEY PROJECT FUND

This fund supports academic programming for all parts of our program, including tuition, textbooks, instructors, and other expenses.

THE FRIENDS OF ODYSSEY FAMILY FUND

This flexible fund supports Odyssey's greatest needs and offers wraparound services for all of our programs, including basic living expenses, unanticipated emergencies, and tech access.

THE ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS FUND

This fund supports Odyssey's academic programming and opportunities for learners in Wisconsin prisons.

ODYSSEY ENDOWMENTS

To see a list of Odyssey's endowment funds, please visit odyssey.wisc.edu/support.

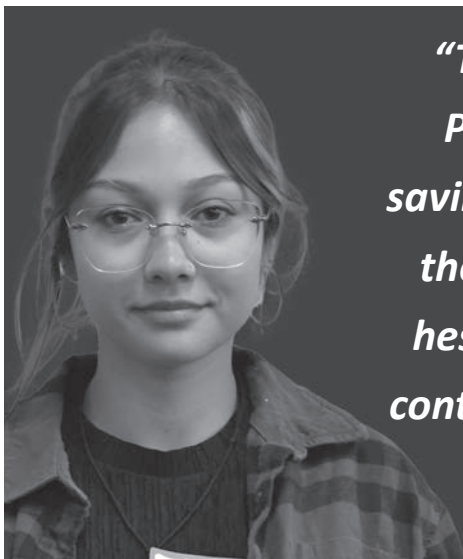
Find uwodysseyproject on:



"The Odyssey Project should be a nationwide program for all families."



"The Odyssey Project is the saving grace for those who are hesitant about continuing their education."



WAYS TO GIVE

Online: odyssey.wisc.edu/support

By check: make payable to UW Foundation. Please be sure to write the name of the fund you would like to support on the memo line.

Mail to:

UW Foundation, US Bank Lockbox 78807
Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807

By phone: 800-443-6162

To learn more, contact Jenny Pressman at jenny.pressman@wisc.edu, 608-287-8216.

MEMORIAL AND HONORARY STUDENT PRIZES

LISA MUNRO TWO-GENERATION SCHOLARSHIP

To honor career counselor and social justice activist Lisa Munro, former UW-Madison Dean of Students Mary K. Rouse proposed a two-generation Odyssey scholarship in Lisa's name. Mary Rouse also helped fund the scholarship along with some of Lisa's relatives and friends. Lisa's husband, Dick Goldberg, recently endowed this scholarship to ensure it can be offered to future generations. Awards go to an Odyssey alum and his or her child or grandchild.

The 2025 recipient is Ashley Lee, Class of 2020. Ashley is pursuing an associate degree in nursing at Madison College and hopes eventually to become a Registered Nurse. Ashley plans to use part of her two-generation scholarship to provide specialized learning tools for her son, Kingston, a second grader with autism. She writes, "Advocating for my child's education, therapy, and overall well-being has strengthened my resilience, problem-solving skills, and ability to balance multiple responsibilities. As I pursue my nursing degree, I bring with me the empathy and perseverance that come from being both a compassionate caregiver and a dedicated mother."



SHARON STARK SCHOLARSHIP

Sharon Stark and her late husband Peter Livingston established a Sharon Stark Scholarship in honor of Brianna Livingston-Lengyel, their granddaughter. This award covers the costs of books, materials, wraparound support, and other expenses for one Odyssey student each year. Sharon commented, "I've long admired Odyssey's mission and accomplishments. It changes lives. When my granddaughter encouraged me to support low-income women of color more directly, I knew right away that Odyssey was the right fit given my passion for education. Creating a scholarship fund is a great way for me to help one student every year as she moves forward with her educational dreams."

The 2025 Sharon Stark scholar is Valvree Mosley. Despite raising two young children, including one with significant special needs, Val has attended class and tutoring faithfully as well as taken part in extra outings to plays, museums, and orchestra concerts. She writes, "I will not quit regardless of the obstacles I'm fighting to overcome for my kids and myself. I am determined to uplift myself, my family, and others."



WANDA AUERBACH MEMORIAL PRIZES

Wanda Auerbach (1927-2012) believed passionately that the richness of a liberal arts education should be available to all, regardless of income or background.

Born poor in Appalachia without running water, she became the first in her family to attend college. After graduating as the valedictorian of Berea College, she earned advanced degrees and became a reference librarian.

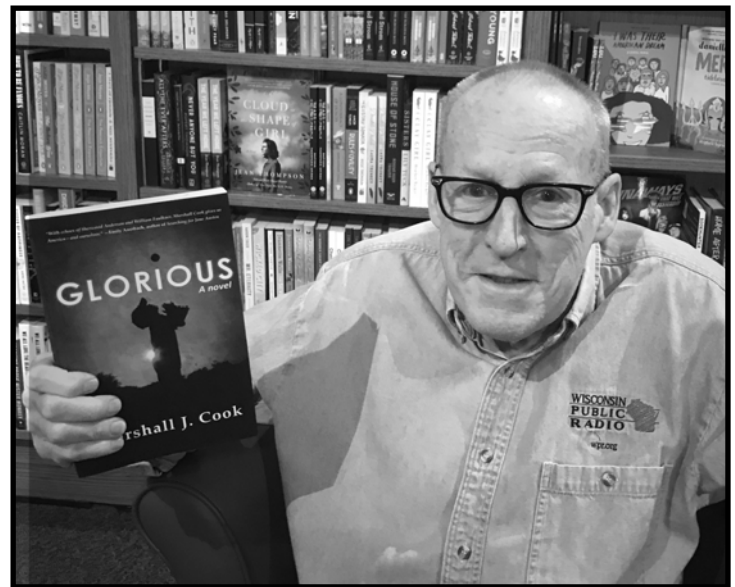


A devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Wanda Auerbach was an ardent supporter of the UW Odyssey Project. In her name, Bob Auerbach and the Auerbach-Meyer family established and added to an endowment to support prizes to all graduating students each year.

MARSHALL COOK MEMORIAL PRIZES

Professor Marshall Cook (1944-2024) was an award-winning teacher adored as “Coach” by hundreds of UW Odyssey students. He imparted a joy of language and a belief in humanity. For the first 18 years of the UW Odyssey Project (until his health declined), he shared his enthusiasm for language and writing with over 500 Odyssey students. Odyssey alumni rave about him: “Because of Coach Marshall, I wrote a book.” “Coach made me love malapropisms, spoonerisms, euphemisms, and all kinds of other words.” “Coach was THE MAN, the kindest man I ever met.”

Marshall was a prolific writer, publishing over 30 works of fiction and non-fiction and hundreds of feature articles and short stories. He was a guest on Oprah and edited a newsletter featuring the work of other writers as well as his own poetry, fiction, and non-fiction.



Marshall’s family describes him as an active church volunteer, avid jogger and biker, baseball fanatic, and lover of pets. Marshall was beloved by friends, students, coworkers, and family alike for his kindness, humility, and humor. Students fondly recall him wearing baseball jerseys into class or a shirt that instead of “Athletic Department” said “Arthritic Department.” He is much missed. We honor his memory and the generosity of his family and friends by awarding prizes in his name to each graduating student.



HUBERTY-LENZ ODYSSEY JUNIOR SCHOLARSHIP

In 2024, Shannon Huberty and husband Maxted Lenz established a scholarship to help graduates of Odyssey Junior pursue a college education. Now attorneys and parents of two young children, Shannon and Max taught in Odyssey Junior while completing their UW degrees. The 2024 Huberty-Lenz recipient was Zawadi Ozulamo, accepted into UW's School of Nursing.

The 2025 Huberty-Lenz scholarship recipient is Alleanah Hancock, with a finalist award given to Anna Uriostegui. Both attended Odyssey Junior when Shannon and Max were on staff and remember them fondly.

Alleanah will start UW in the fall on a four-year Music Clinic scholarship for vocal performance. She remembers receiving help from Shannon and other Odyssey Junior staff to boost her literacy and her confidence as a child. Alleanah writes, "This scholarship will allow me to earn a degree in music and provide quality opportunities to nurture young people's love for music no matter their socioeconomic status, like my mentors did for me."



Anna is finishing her first year at UW as a Biology major heading toward a career as a Physician Assistant. Now on the staff of Odyssey Junior, Anna notes, "Odyssey is a place to grow, a place where I feel safe, and most importantly Odyssey is my family that I am forever grateful for. It's given me confidence, community, and the chance to turn my dreams into reality."



ANTHONY D'ALESSANDRO & ALISON TENBRUGGENCATE ODYSSEY HEALTH CARE SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship for an Odyssey student pursuing a career in a health care field is funded generously by Alison TenBruggencate (President of the Friends of Odyssey Board) and her husband Anthony D'Alessandro (a renowned UW surgeon).

The 2025 recipient of the Odyssey Health Care Scholarship is Ashley Lee '20. Ashley attributes part of her interest in healthcare to being the mother of a son with autism. A CNA from age 17-20 and a Medical Assistant from age 21 to the present, Ashley's goal is to become a Registered Nurse. Ashley adds, "I feel called to work in the healthcare field because I love helping people. For me, healthcare is not just a job but a way to give back to my community."





PAT WILMETH ONWARD ODYSSEY SCHOLARSHIP

Created by Sally Wilmeth in memory of her mother, an educator, the Pat Wilmeth Onward Odyssey scholarship supports an alum of the UW Odyssey Project enrolled in a degree program leading to a college degree at an accredited institution located in the Midwest.

The 2025 recipient is Sukai Yarbo, Odyssey Class of 2017. Sukai describes herself as a “dedicated mother, full-time employee, and graduate student” pursuing her master’s degree in special education at the UW-Madison. Originally from The Gambia, Sukai hopes as a special education teacher in the future to nurture the potential of children with a wide range of abilities and learning styles.



AAUW SCHOLARSHIPS

The Madison/Monona chapter of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) generously awards scholarships to Odyssey women continuing their education at community colleges in the fall. Below are brief biographies and photos of the two 2025 recipients.



Adrianne Farrow '25 is enrolled in the Liberal Arts Transfer Program at Madison College. Adrianne hopes to earn both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from UW-Madison in Business and Informational Technology. “Even though life has thrown me many curve balls,” Adrianne writes, “I am determined to go forward to create a better life for my daughter and me.”

Andrea White '23 is enrolled in the Liberal Arts Transfer Program at Madison College. Andrea writes, “My ultimate goal is to become the CEO of a nonprofit organization that centers racial equity, economic justice, and holistic family support.” While raising two daughters and caring for her elderly mother, Andrea has held leadership positions in the Urban League, Homeless Services Committee, and other organizations.



MORE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ODYSSEY STUDENTS

Students in our Class of 2025 are Evjue Foundation, Brittingham Foundation, and UW Anonymous Committee scholars through sponsorships by those organizations. We also gratefully acknowledge scholarships our students have won from The Business Forum of Madison, Women in Focus, and other organizations. To sign up for our monthly e-newsletters highlighting the successes of our alumni as they go on to win awards and earn degrees that many were told would not be possible, visit our website.

To donate to any of our existing scholarship funds or to create a new one in honor or memory of someone special in your life, please contact Jenny Pressman at jenny.pressman@wisc.edu or 608-287-8216.

FRIEND OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT AWARD



Each year, the Odyssey Project recognizes an individual or organization that has supported its mission in remarkable ways. This year, we bestow the 2025 Friend of the UW Odyssey Project Award on Roberta “Bobbie” Wang.

Bobbie, who worked at UW–Madison for over 50 years, has supported Odyssey’s growth for the last 20 years through her financial expertise, attention to detail and organization, and delicious baked goods. As Odyssey grew from one course to six programs, from a small organization with a few donors to a multi-million-dollar venture, Bobbie painstakingly created increasingly complex budgets, put together reports for campus, local, state, and federal grants, and remained calm and collegial in the face of bureaucratic challenges. She graciously collaborated for months with her excellent successor, Ben Garrison, to make the transition smooth after her retirement in December.

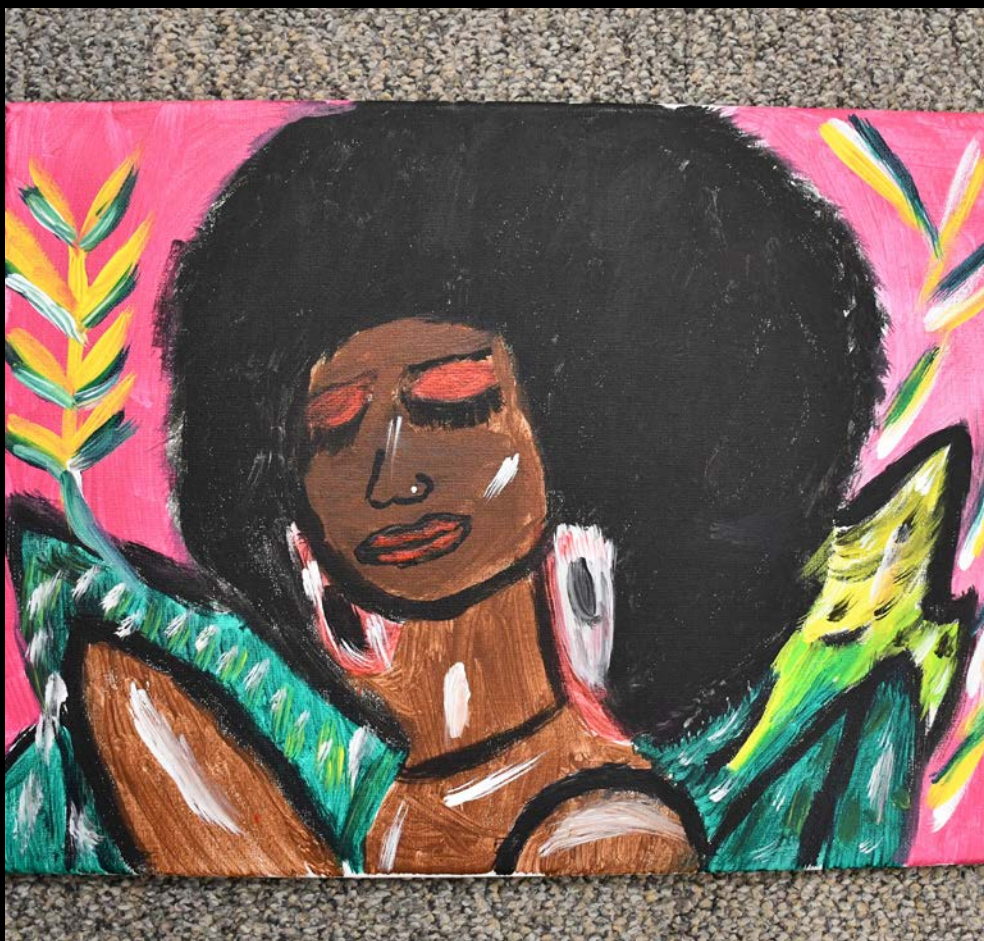
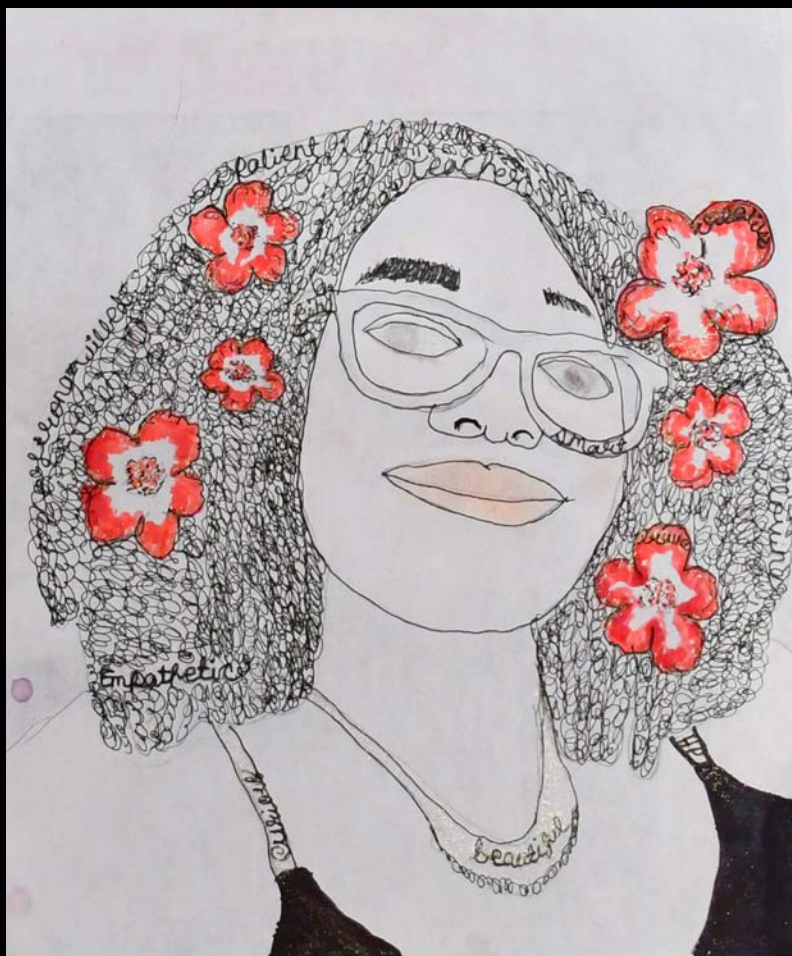
We congratulate Bobbie and wish her all the best as she enjoys more time with her family, church choir, and volunteer activities, all while cheering on her relatives on the award-winning Mad City Ski Team.





"Dancing through life—creating, exploring, and learning to use my voice. Becoming surer of myself every day."

—Abby Wilson



"The loss I felt in a whirlwind of pain, my brother . . . and Mom. I'll take with me your strength and resilience and grace. Blinders off, sunlight streaming down, I walk in my peace."

—Sable Wright



She was as broken as shattered glass. . . .

The wounds remain,
like scars in stained glass,

but they no longer define her.
Instead, they catch the light,

Turning her past
into a mosaic of resilience and hope.

—Gloria Knight



**"All of life's problems are on the shoulders of
Black women, but growth still surrounds us
even when we've been beaten and dragged
down. We still emit light."**

—Aaniyah Jefferson

