

YEAR 23, ISSUE 8

JANUARY 14, 2026

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

MAKING A CASE FOR SEMESTER TWO



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MAKING A CASE FOR SEMESTER TWO

As the Fall 2025 semester ended, all 30 resilient Odyssey students made a case for why they should continue their journey together into the Spring 2026 semester.



I am an important part of our community. I participate, I share, and I connect. I've taken the time to be vulnerable, to share my life and my story. I've tried

to get to know everyone. I give 110% every time I walk through those doors, and no matter what I'm going through, I don't bring it here with me. I always turn my homework in and haven't missed a class, not to mention I show up on Mondays when time permits. No matter what, I make Odyssey a priority in my life.

Wednesdays are the best part of my week, and I look forward to it! I don't know what I'm going to do with myself during winter break, and I'm so sad time is flying because I never want it to end! I can't wait to continue learning, growing, and prospering. I'm excited to see what my future brings. I've learned I'm worthy. I can do it, and it's never too late! **(Laura Bass)**



I'm dedicated, smart, and driven to do my best to have a successful future. These last three months being in the Odyssey class have taught me a lot and altered my perception on things. I've been able to meet very smart and successful people while attending class,

showing me that your past does not have to determine your future. Coming to class each week, I contribute to the class by being an active listener and participating. I would love to continue learning



in second semester! I didn't come this far to quit. Being in Odyssey is the stepping stone I need to help further my education. **(Serene Boyd)**



The program has helped me. It's helped me stay on my feet. I've had help at class and outside of class. I've learned a decent amount about different things and people. I've struggled a little bit, but the ones from the program were there for me and helpful.

The program has helped me in some areas such as speech, spelling, and comprehension. I like the fact that we earn credits for college. Writing was also something the program helped me with. I've got more work to do, and I feel like the program can help me with that. Even when I started to struggle, the program didn't give up on me. I plan to do what I have to do in order to succeed in the program and in the future. Sometimes I need a little push, and the program gives me that push I need. **(Johnnell Britt)**



I should continue my journey with Odyssey to continue growing and evolving. Looking back, I see how far my writing skills have improved. I feel more confident on paper. Not only have I grown on

paper but my perspective also has changed for the better. I've learned the truths about history, stories and facts that were kept from us as children. The Odyssey Project has made learning so interesting and fun. From music, art, history, and community, there is much to gain.

I plan to continue my spring semester strong, with the hope to continue on with Onward Odyssey. I'm fulfilling my purpose. One of my biggest blessings from this are the new friendships I've gained both with other students and staff. I plan to return refreshed, with a new set of eyes and tools to carry onward. This is only the beginning of something GREAT. Stay tuned.

(Lisa Brown)



I should be in the second semester because I got almost caught up on all my work before class today. I feel myself growing stronger and smarter every day, even though we only have class once a week. I found myself adjusting my schedule just to be here. I have gotten courage to stand up in front of a crowd and show them my knowledge from Odyssey. I'm not there all the way, but I will get there if I stay, so keep me for the rest. I need to finish! **(Richard Butler)**



Life has a funny way of grounding you. I cannot remember word for word what I wrote in my initial essay entry, but I do know my main goal. I want to be successful, I want to be a provider to my son, and I want to create a better future for us.

I have felt such great support, resources, and encouragement with Odyssey that I feel even more determined to go beyond my goals. I am a great mother, daughter, sister, and student. I am determined to succeed. **(Stacy Castillo)**



Being a part of Odyssey has been a life changing experience for me, and I strongly believe that continuing into the second semester will allow me to keep growing both personally and academically. Odyssey has helped shape me into a better person and has allowed me to see life from a perspective I never had before.

Before joining Odyssey, I often doubted myself and struggled with feeling unimportant. Through this program, I have learned to believe in myself and recognize my worth. Odyssey has given me the encouragement and support I needed to overcome those challenges and push past my fears. I no longer see myself as someone unsure of her abilities but as someone capable of growth and success.

Since being in Odyssey, I have found a sense of purpose. I feel motivated and inspired, knowing I have something meaningful to look forward to. This feeling is something I had been missing for a long time. For the first time in a while, I am achieving my goals, my strengths, and working toward the future I want for myself.

When I first entered Odyssey, I was scared and unsure of the knowledge or skills I had to offer. However, the guidance and support from everyone in the program helped me become a better version of myself. Odyssey represents my journey as a woman striving to accomplish long term, meaningful goals, and I am committed to continuing that journey with determination and confidence.

In addition, I am preparing to welcome my baby girl into the world. Being part of Odyssey has motivated me not only for myself but for her as well. I want my daughter to know that her mother accomplished meaningful goals before she arrived, and that I strived to become the best version of myself for her. Odyssey has encouraged me to push forward, stay focused, and build a strong foundation so I can be a positive role model for my child.

I am incredibly thankful and grateful to be a part of Odyssey. This program has become more than just a place of learning. You all have become a family to me. The love, support, and encouragement I have received have made me feel welcomed, valued, and understood. I truly appreciate everyone who has welcomed me with open arms and believed in me, even when I struggled to believe in myself.

(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)





I should continue the second part of class because I deserve this—Valencia deserves this. More importantly, I wanted to be in Odyssey because I thought of it like a level up, another graduation, an accomplishment, a step moving forward in my education. It is and it was back

in Jan 2024 [when I applied]. Now it's soo much more. I'm finding myself, I'm loving myself, and I'm pushing myself. I'm noticing myself. I'm in this place where I can see so clearly that "Education" is my goal. It isn't about the highest degree or the biggest book or how much information I can retain but being present, listening, and asking to gain knowledge!!! I'm gaining knowledge from experience, insight, and culture! I know we have lessons and homework, but most of what I've learned so far is about me! I'm learning where I'm at, where I'm going, and who I am!

This s**t has been hard for real, and it's not the assignments but it's everything else that I can't control, things that have really been holding me back, the s**t that's always going to be there. I would be stuck there too if I had never come to Odyssey. I should continue on the second semester because I'm thriving; I'm alive! I bring joy, laughter, experience, curiosity, compassion, love, and light. I cannot become the best version of myself alone, but with Odyssey I know I will! Thank you.

(Valencia Collins)



When I first started Odyssey, I wanted to learn more about grammar and how to express myself more and better. Since being here, I have learned not only about grammar but also about history, art, and poems. It opened my eyes to things that I didn't know would pique my

interest.

Coming here and being a part of this program is something I look forward to. The amazing conversations with staff and the students make



you think outside of the box. Also Odyssey makes you dig deeper within yourself, see things from a different perspective. My contribution is my part of the knowledge and experience that I bring to conversations. Being a part of this class makes me want to do better and be better. It makes me eager to learn. I was never into art, but when Gene Phillips comes in, I look forward to learning new things and the deep conversations we have. Knowledge is power! **(Paola Damiani)**



What I have gotten out of this class so far is that you don't have to be perfect. Spelling and writing correct sentences don't have to be perfect, and that is not that important. The program has strengthened my writing, reading, critical thinking, and setting up goals

for myself to better my career and education. I have seen significant changes in my work through the Monday night homework club! I am glad I came and got so much out of it. The critical thinking in class work has me using my brain and being scared of what to write in a short time, but I feel like I have been putting in the work. I want to be part of the class for a second semester because I am here to challenge myself, work on my public speaking, and continue to grow. Hopefully this journey will be rewarding in the end! **(Tida Drammeh)**



As each class has pushed me for better, I'm begging for a second chance because I have more room to grow. I have not blossomed yet! With the courage from each teacher, I'm thankful and would love to stay for second semester. Odyssey has brought me out my shell.

Odyssey has helped me learn, read, and write. I really need more, more as in my escape from reality. My world is filled with chaos, and every Wednesday my kids and I are looking forward to class. I'm extremely thankful for the opportunity Emily has offered my kids and me. Please consider us for next semester: WE NEED IT! **(Destiny Drone)**



I would like to continue because I want to keep learning and continue my journey of bettering myself. Even though I'm shy and don't say much, I really am enjoying myself, and I have learned so much! I know that I have more to give in class, and I am working on

finding my voice. I've found my love for reading

again, and I am getting more confident in my writing. I love being in an environment with other intellectual people. I don't want my journey with Odyssey to be over yet. I'm so excited to learn more and to keep challenging myself.

This has been such an amazing opportunity. My daughter is enjoying Odyssey Junior and looks forward to coming every week. I have contributed many moments of my life through writing that I normally would not share. I also think I bring a positive energy. I try to be as kind as possible and stay open minded. The journey toward furthering my education isn't over yet; this is just the beginning. **(Kiana Galloway)**



I've already come this far, and it's too late to turn back now. I've done my best to turn homework in on time. I have only had one late assignment, also only one missed day of class. I have continued to put this first for myself and to continue to challenge myself.

Since being in the class I have learned to speak up more, to be comfortable with speaking in the

classroom and group assignments. I have become more open and vulnerable, to share more of my story. I have learned more about not having fragments in my writing and learning to write complete sentences. I want to take these writing skills further with writing a children's book. I enjoy being here---meeting new people and learning more about things that were not that interesting at first. I hope to continue to learn and grow. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**





Odyssey means a lot of different religions, a better understanding of reading and writing and of life situations. Different people have gone through Odyssey, and everybody has a story to tell.

I learned how to be motivated myself, to take my time, to learn to pay attention and stay focused. You can still learn though whatever situation you are going through. **(Larry Grant)**



I learned a lot of history, a brain refresher. I learned about the things around us. I learned and gained more strength within myself—to express my inner self more and to talk and write down things inside. I love that I have a strong team beside me through

this journey of change. I do want to push myself harder. I need more time to focus. I love going to tutoring and getting help through assignments. On



top of life problems, I step into this room with my outside problems to the side to focus on something beautiful for the future of my babies and me. I've always been alone in this journey of life. I will love to continue toward the beautiful life we deserve. GOD BLESS MY PATHS. **(Anteijah Greer)**



As the weeks go by, I find myself getting a little more comfortable in class with people who I do not know. I am not a very open person, and it has been hard to speak up in class. This past semester in class has broadened my writing in ways I would have never imagined before Odyssey. My goal in the next few months is to be able to put my letters into actual words. I want to continue with Odyssey because it is helping me build confidence, get new skills and experiences, meet new people that are inspiring me, and to continue to give me hope. I will continue to help me find my voice and a sense of empowerment. I plan on continuing my education next fall after completion of Odyssey. **(Shataya Hall)**



WOW!!! The first thing I would say I've learned from the Odyssey Program is to never give up. I have met so many beautiful people that want to see me succeed in the Odyssey Program and at life. I have gained a family, met some really great people. This

Odyssey gave me the motivation and support to help me with my divorce case. This program helped me to know that I can accomplish anything.

My son and I have a dream of opening a nonprofit organization to help young black men. Being in the Odyssey Program helped me to know that it is possible. What I gave back to Odyssey was to help a couple of classmates with some assignments, and I volunteered in a project. I made any classmates laugh and smile. I feel like I'm a part of something big, and I can't stop now. It's only the beginning. I want to show my daughters it is never too late. It's a new beginning for me.

(Jacqueline Hawkins)



As stated when I applied for the Odyssey Program, I wanted to join to make a better way for my children and provide them with the life they deserve. I have learned so much in class, including new

and old vocabulary. I have found ways to connect with different music and get a better understanding and outlook on meaning and writings. I would like to be a part of the second semester so I can keep learning and reach all my educational goals. I feel like the knowledge I've learned in the Odyssey Program will get me so far, and the vocabulary will help me project myself better in higher rooms with high class people. This program has been a great experience, and I know it will keep growing over the years. **(Brittany Hughes)**



Describe my then self: very shy, timid, secured in my comfort place. But these weeks in the Odyssey Project have allowed Angel to confidently now say I CAN change my story; for everyone's story is marked by moments of hardship, pain, and struggle. For Angel these

moments have sometimes felt defining and then inescapable, like heavy chapters inked in sorrow. But life's greatest truth is that my past doesn't have to dictate my future. So I plead my case as I have grown out of my comfort zone. I have learned words I've always wanted to incorporate into my vocabulary, my life, and a regular part of my verbiage. I have learned true friendships in two classmates. Learning with them, encouraging them, and praying for them has been a delight to me. So, yes, Angel can grow. I have been given the tools to change my story. **(Angel Moore)**





When I began this journey, I was full of self-doubt, but now I no longer feel that way. I have learnt how to express myself and how to convey my feelings in a way that I could

reflect and later learn from. I have gained a great group of individuals who in spite of their circumstances continue to come to class and give it their all. I am so very proud to be a part of this class; we have come so far together, and even though many obstacles have been put in our way, we continue to move forward. One phrase to describe our 2026 class is in Maya Angelou's words, "We rise." My classmates have inspired me to be more, and I am so proud to be a part of this group. In the little time I have had, we have had so many fun experiences, and I am forever grateful. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**



Well, I think I should be allowed to continue to the second semester because I always make sure my work is done on time, and I participate in class. So far, I am accomplishing my goal of turning my weaknesses to my strength. My other goal is to complete the program and

give back to it. I want to maybe be a speaker for Odyssey. **(Shelton Murphy)**



I think I should continue into the second semester of the UW Odyssey Project because I feel the shift of what this class is shaping me to be: the best version of myself. I enjoy coming to class. Participating and engaging in class really is helping me open up more, and

be more confident in my voice, writing, and myself overall. I feel that I bring a warm presence for peers to be comfortable around. I want to continue to bring that warm presence, open mind, and overall positive outlook with me to class next semester. I am proud of my progress, and I can't wait to continue to grow though Odyssey. **(Roché Palmer)**



Being part of Odyssey has been an incredible experience so far. I won't hesitate to say that my very first day came with a huge obstacle I never imagined facing. My car was unexpectedly repossessed that same day. I didn't know how I would get to work, pick up my kids, or even

make it to school. I was distraught, exhausted, and honestly on the verge of giving up.

But something inside me told me to reach out to my instructor, to look for another way, like I always do. That day, she didn't let me give up. She gave me hope and clarity. She reminded me why I needed to keep going and why it mattered that I showed up on that first day.

I held myself together until the end of class, when I spoke with another Odyssey alum. It felt like they truly understood where I was coming from. In that moment, being there felt almost impossible. It took so much courage and strength, and even though the tears fell, I still completed my worksheet, turned it in, and walked out with my head up.

From that day on, I have continued to show up. Even as more obstacles have come my way, I am still here. I am still running the race because I deserve to be here. I deserve this opportunity.

I have a story to tell, and I refuse to let my story end here. Joining the second semester of Odyssey means continuing to unfold that story. It means continuing to learn, to grow, and to educate myself, not just for me, but for my children. I want to show them that you don't have to have everything in this world...sometimes, simply just showing up means more than anything else.

Knowing that there are genuine people out there who truly want to help and see you succeed, no matter the challenges, can be deeply comforting. It's priceless to have a support system that consistently reminds you of your worth and the importance of being part of Odyssey.

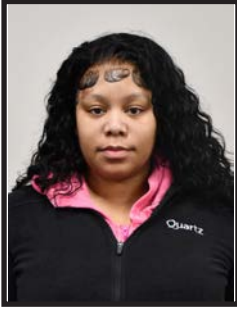
This second semester is another step forward, and I am excited about what it will bring and where it will take us. Thank you for this amazing opportunity. I look forward to continuing my education and showing up. **(Roncal Riley)**



I am usually quiet and stay to myself. Since joining Odyssey, I have learned that I am not alone. My fellow classmates have felt and/or feel the same way I felt. To be honest, the reason I speak in class or volunteer to read is because of them. I feel supported and not

judged. I feel comfortable and confident in class because we are all in this together. I feel Odyssey has given me a community of love, laughter, and friends. I think I have contributed the same. I try to (at least I hope) show I'm here for anyone that may need a smile or a conversation. I would like to be a part of the class because I feel I have a sense of belonging here and I'm not judged. I also feel like I have learned a lot and improved in my writing. Most of all, I want to be a part of the Odyssey legacy because I will not stop here. I plan to continue my education and become someone. I do hope to help my community in any way I can as well because, even if they don't know, they have helped me just by writing their stories. Sharing their life is inspiring and motivating. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**





I've learned so much being a part of this program. I have learned things I never imagined I would know, from music to history to different

vocabulary words. I enjoy coming here. This is a breath of fresh air for me where I leave all my problems at the door and focus on learning new things from different perspectives and people's views other than my own. I would like to be a part of the next semester because I would like to continue to learn, grow my vocabulary, and be a part of the awesome class setting where I enjoy socializing with my peers and us discovering new things together. This program has shaped me in the time I've come to want to learn and to be excited about school and my journey. It gives me meaning on Wednesdays and something to look forward to. I am able to be myself in class with no one judging me or putting me down. I don't have to feel embarrassed for things I don't know or understand. This program has helped me overcome the fear of being Judged. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



Odyssey for me so far is amazing. I love coming to tutoring on Mondays and love coming on Wednesdays to see all my classmates excited to be here with me. I am really starting to be more open with everyone. My handwriting has gotten a little

better. I try to ask for help as much as possible. The teachers are great, always helping and letting me know Odyssey is for me. I want to thrive and make the best of the rest of the semester. I am determined to graduate from this class. I will not give up if I am given this opportunity. I will put 110% of my mind to be a great story for Odyssey. **(George Sydnor)**



I would love to be a part of the second semester of Odyssey because I've gained the opportunity to learn, connect, and overcome educational barriers that my past self would feel were insurmountable. I've been present, communicated effectively, and mostly (not

always) been accountable when it comes to homework and assignments. Today, I am still me but I now identify as a writer and a student. The program and its staff have had an impact on not only my education but also on my confidence and personal life. I'm grateful for the experience I've had, and I'm optimistic about my future. **(Shaneece Taylor)**



I cannot believe we are already at the end of the semester. Over the last three months I've noticed my growth in writing and speaking in front of others. I am building community and relationships with people and opening up to sitting by others. This project is a blessing; I

have written about many challenges that I faced on my journey. I work hard on my homework, and I am efficient turning in assignments. The Odyssey Project is for young brothers like myself, giving us an opportunity to restore and rebuild our future. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**



I feel the program has given me a broader view and helps create a more rounded perspective from others. There's always more to learn. There's an opportunity to be connected to resources and programs to continue progression. I try to contribute to the conversations,

but also I'm interested in others speaking because it leads me to ask more and inquire about topics.

(Kharmen Thomas)



When I first applied to the Odyssey Project, I was searching for confidence. I applied right after completing the UW Medical Assistant Apprenticeship program. Although that accomplishment meant a lot to me, it resurfaced that feeling I had in middle

school and high school – that school is too hard for me. I don't belong! My desire is to become a pediatric RN, but I needed something to help me feel like I belong as a student in college. I needed a boost to believe I could handle my next step. Learning has been difficult for me, and because of that, I learned to tuck my tail when it comes to school and learning around other people. I wanted to love books and writing, but focusing felt impossible, and I never believed I had what it takes to fully express myself or find the right words or spelling.

This class has been a blessing! It has helped me restore my confidence and reminded me that my learning differences are not something God gave me to stop me, but something to shape how I grow; something to remind me that He didn't bring me this far to leave me here. I am being reminded that my voice matters, that I am capable, and that I can succeed and I do belong. I just have

to show up and trust the process. Odyssey is the right setting for learning what you need – a journey where each step teaches you your own name, not what you've been called or answered to. Odyssey teaches the art of advocating for yourself, allowing your inner voice to be free, no longer whispering to survive but speaking to arrive.

Continuing into the second semester matters to me – not just for me but also for my kids. I want my kids, especially my oldest, to see what it looks like when learning is hard and that it's ok to advocate for yourself without feeling shame. I want them to see that with the right people in your corner to give you that extra support, you can go further. I need them to know that with faith, trusting in God's plan, and perseverance, growth is possible. The Odyssey Project has helped me see myself as a UW-Madison student, and I am committed to continuing this journey with gratitude, purpose, and determination. I'm excited about the second semester. What new ideas will be birthed? What else am I going to learn? What more can I do? How can I encourage a classmate? These are all questions bouncing around in my head along with many more. **(Shakila Woods)**

