

YEAR 23

APRIL 29, 2026

ODYSSEY ORACLE

CELEBRATING THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2026!





SONG OF THE CLASS OF 2026

We are the Odyssey Class of 2026!

We have worked as a CNA, nanny, cook, bartender, waste manager, medical assistant, stay-at-home mom, custodian, special education assistant, house cleaner, cashier selling calendars at the mall, hair braider, grocery bagger, school lunch server, security guard, dialysis tech, student bus driver, waitress, caregiver, case manager, life guard, handyman, and truck unloader, with jobs at Taco Bell, Burger King, T-Mobile, Sprint, UPS, Walmart, Madison Metropolitan School District, UW Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital, and the City of Madison.

We hail from Madison, Racine, Onalaska, and Milwaukee, WI; Brooklyn, NY; Chicago, IL; San Francisco, CA; St. Paul, MN; Nashville, TN; Flint, MI; Baltimore, MD; Gary, IN; Louisville, KY; Montgomery, AL; Atlanta and Dunwoody, GA; San Juan, Puerto Rico; South Africa, Italy, the Gambia, and Russia,

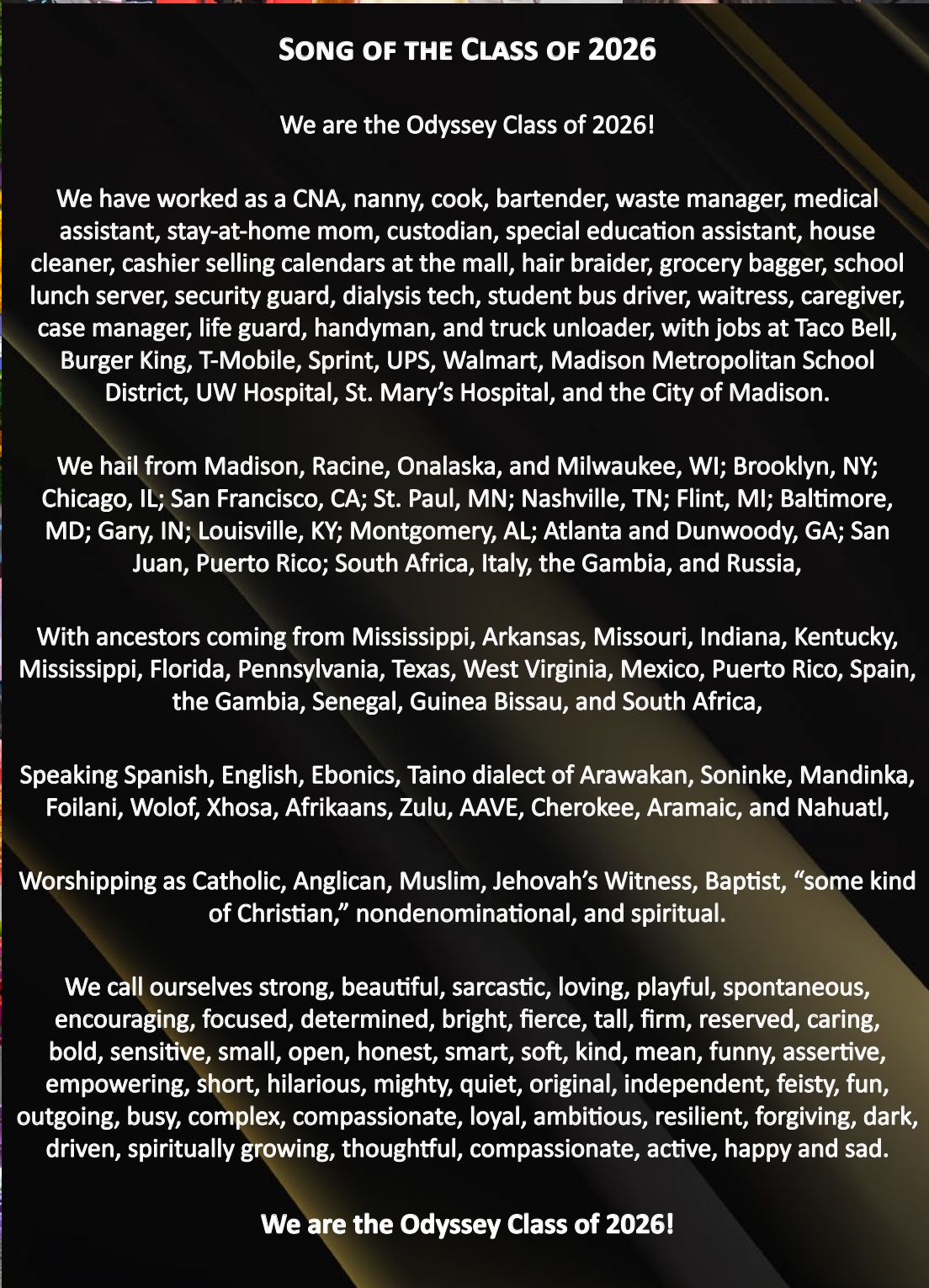
With ancestors coming from Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, the Gambia, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, and South Africa,

Speaking Spanish, English, Ebonics, Taino dialect of Arawakan, Soninke, Mandinka, Foilani, Wolof, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Zulu, AAVE, Cherokee, Aramaic, and Nahuatl,

Worshipping as Catholic, Anglican, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Baptist, "some kind of Christian," nondenominational, and spiritual.

We call ourselves strong, beautiful, sarcastic, loving, playful, spontaneous, encouraging, focused, determined, bright, fierce, tall, firm, reserved, caring, bold, sensitive, small, open, honest, smart, soft, kind, mean, funny, assertive, empowering, short, hilarious, mighty, quiet, original, independent, feisty, fun, outgoing, busy, complex, compassionate, loyal, ambitious, resilient, forgiving, dark, driven, spiritually growing, thoughtful, compassionate, active, happy and sad.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2026!



UW ODYSSEY PROJECT CLASS OF 2026 GRADUATION CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2026, 6-7:30 PM
GREAT HALL, MEMORIAL UNION, MADISON, WISCONSIN

ORDER OF EVENTS

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC

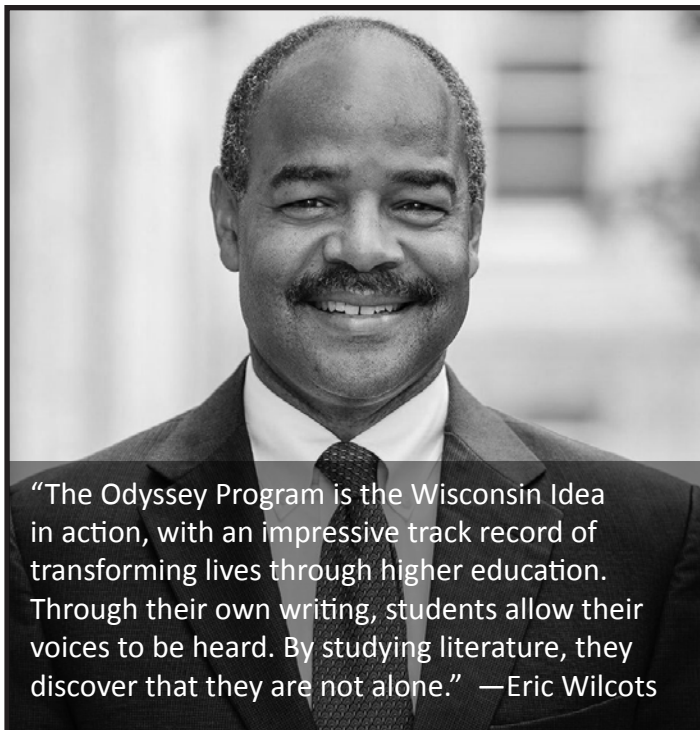
Bob Auerbach, Piano

WELCOMING AND CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

Emily Auerbach, Odyssey Executive Director

Kevin Mullen, Odyssey Director of
Adult Education

Incoming Interim Chancellor Eric Wilcots,
Guest speaker



"The Odyssey Program is the Wisconsin Idea in action, with an impressive track record of transforming lives through higher education. Through their own writing, students allow their voices to be heard. By studying literature, they discover that they are not alone." —Eric Wilcots

WINNERS OF THE 2026 FRIEND OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT AWARD

Mary Rouse, former UW Dean of Students

Martin Rouse, DCS Associate Dean Emeritus

ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2026 PRESENTATIONS

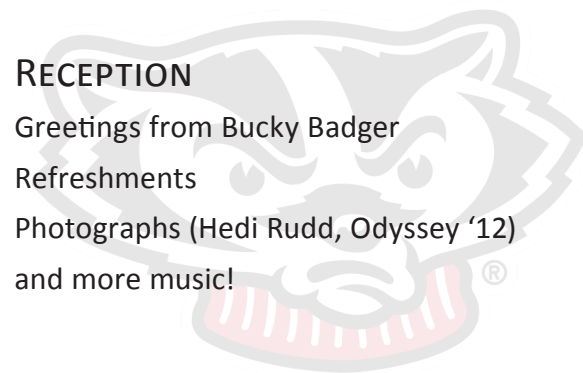
RECEPTION

Greetings from Bucky Badger

Refreshments

Photographs (Hedi Rudd, Odyssey '12)

and more music!



Sponsors:



TruStage



ODYSSEY GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2026



LAURA BASS

Good evening! I want to extend my sincerest gratitude for you coming and supporting the class of 2026. This class is filled with people who have worked hard despite all the obstacles that have been put in

their path to destroy them. But we as a community have fought to make it to this point. We have put forth the effort to fight for our dreams and jump start our journeys to success.

Today I want to thank Emily and the staff of Odyssey. I will never be able to put into words or repay you for this opportunity. The joy and fire you sparked in my soul and in my life is indescribable. To my kids – I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE. You are the inspiration, the motivation, and my reason. To my mother, my heart and my lifeline, I know I can move mountains because of you. I appreciate and love all you are. Thank you for simply being you. To Ryan—my peace, my safe place. Thank you for always supporting me. I have the time and space to dream and achieve because you take care of me. To my family—this is

for me, this is for y'all. This is only the beginnng: it's only up from here.

And last but not least to Odyssey Class of 2026 – thank you for being my safe place every Wednesday night. Thank you for giving me a place I can be myself unapologetically, for community, for laughter, and just simply for your existence.

To Odyssey past and present, I pray peace, abundance, and pure happiness over your life. May we stay intertwined 'til it's our time. With love from Laura Jay



SERENE BOYD

Hello, everyone! Let me start by saying thank you to Emily and all the amazing Odyssey staff. I admire the staff's altruistic efforts within the community. Emily, you're a gift from God. Thank you for giving

me the opportunity to be a part of this year's Odyssey class and always displaying graciousness. I want to shout out the Odyssey Junior staff for the patience and care they gave my daughter. As a first-time mom with an eight-month-old, I was nervous about childcare, but the staff eased my anxiety.

Lastly, my utmost gratitude goes to all my loved ones and friends for their support and encouragement—especially my mother, who stood by my side through and through. I remember applying for this program and feeling discouraged due to fear of rejection. Yet my mother uplifted me, and here I am now!

It's bittersweet being at graduation this evening. I'll miss coming to class filled with unity and laughter every Wednesday. But I know there will always be a spot for me at Odyssey, and this is only the beginning of my learning journey!

*I've learned I
am worthy, I
can do it, and
it's never too
late!*



**JOHNNELL BRITT**

(Fall only) The program has helped me stay on my feet. I've had help at class and outside of class. I've struggled a little bit, but the ones from the program were there for me and helpful. Odyssey

helped me with some areas such as speech, spelling, and comprehension. I like the fact that we earn credits for college. Even when I started to struggle, the program didn't give up on me.

**LISA BROWN**

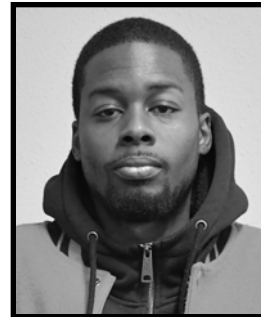
First off, I would like to give thanks to God for guiding me through this incredible journey. Second, I would like to give thanks to Mrs. Emily and the entire Odyssey Project staff. You all held

space and allowed me to evolve and blossom into a better version of myself. From pouring words of encouragement, kindness, and patience, your actions never went unnoticed. You saw my potential when I didn't fully see it myself.

Odyssey has become the foundation for my future dreams and aspirations. It challenged me to dig deeper and to reignite the fire I hold in my soul. I

plan to take all the lessons I've gained through this project and apply them to all areas in my life.

To my mother ... all of this is for you as well. You've been my rock through it all. Through the highs and lows, you always supported me. I love you always!

**RICHARD WILLIAM BUTLER III**

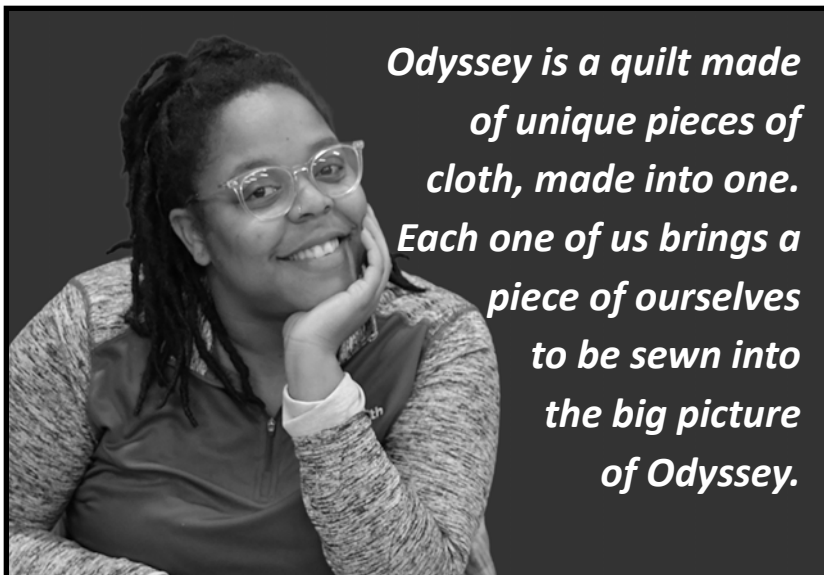
Hi! Odyssey was such another great start for me in life. I would like to thank the entire Odyssey staff for all the efforts and hard work put into bringing us here today. I am

grateful for all of my instructors and also the Odyssey Junior staff. Without that support, I would have potentially dropped out. I want to thank my classmates as well! Seeing them speak up and show their voices and lights inspired me to show mine.

**STACY CASTILLO**

Life has really been a never-ending roller coaster for me. I know we all are dealing with struggles we do not speak of. For that I am extremely grateful for each and every person in my life who has

made the start of my career and dreams possible. I could genuinely not have done it without every single person who has modified their plans and schedules to provide my child an evening or two away from me in order to complete classwork let alone show up to class. I also want to thank every member of the Odyssey program who has devoted their time and kindness to make my schooling experience the best yet. I want every person in my thoughts to know that I strive to be a piece of every single one of you. I admire the selflessness, the ambition, motivation, and love each and every one of you offer. Thank you!





**CQUEMIAH NANAYIAH
CLARK-RICHMOND**

I want to take a moment to thank every one of you: Emily, Emily's father, Kevin, Brian, Char, the rest of the staff, my family, my daughter, my friends, and my Odyssey

family, Class of 2026. You all have been amazing to me, pushing me to do better, bringing out the light in me, and supporting me every step of the way during our Odyssey class. I truly don't know where I would be without you all.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to be part of Odyssey. This experience has helped me grow, find my courage, and see what I am capable of. I remember spending Wednesdays feeling lost and unsure, but with your guidance and encouragement, Wednesday has been the best day of the week for me. I found the courage I didn't know I had. I found success, I found my voice, and most importantly, I found myself.

Thank you for believing in me, for celebrating my victories, and for giving me the tools and support to move forward in life. I carry your encouragement with me as I continue to chase my dreams and create a better future for myself and my daughter. The stress I had is now my strength, the doubt I had is now I did it, and the sadness I had is now my joy.

My classmates, my Odyssey, my 2026 Family: We did It! I love you all and wish you all the best. I want you all to continue to grow, strive, and live the best life you can be. Y'all are my family, and I couldn't thank you enough for the support I had.

Yi'lynn Avery Ann Scurlock: everything I did, I did it for you. Mommy is going to show you everything you need to know to become the best woman you can be when you're older. You have been with me every step of the way and pushed Mommy further. Thank you, baby. I love you so much.



VALENCIA COLLINS

Huge shout out to Emily and all the staff and the Class of 2026. Thank you!

Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for the time and motivation, the

support that I needed at the perfect moment, a time when I was unsure and undecided with no plan and no goal. I knew I wanted to make something of myself, but I had no idea on how to do that and was very insecure about being able to change my narrative.

With Odyssey I found my purpose, I heard my voice, and envisioned my life.

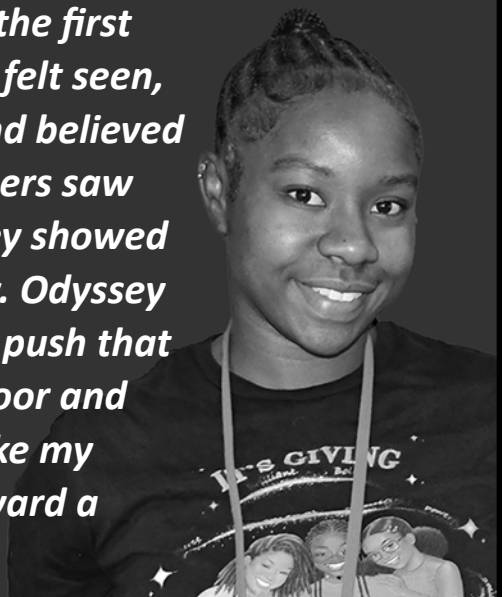


PAOLA DAMIANI

This journey was a great one, and in the process of it all, I give thanks to the people who have been there from the beginning, no questions asked. I would like to start by thanking my husband for

always just being there and supporting me through whatever endeavor I decide to do. I thank Josie, my sweet baby girl, for taking me to school and from

Odyssey was the first place where I felt seen, supported, and believed in. Where others saw limits, Odyssey showed me possibility. Odyssey gave me that push that opened the door and helped me take my first steps toward a better future.



every Monday and Wednesday no questions asked because she knew her mama was tired. I thank her for motivating me when everything seemed like it was too much and a part of me wanted to quit. To my three younger kids, thanks for being with me and reminding me that we have school.

I would also like to thank the whole Odyssey team for being our number one fans throughout our journey, for making sure that we are mentally ok, and for making it their business to make sure that we show up and are present. This whole team—the teachers, the childcare providers, the special guests, the old alumni coming in and sharing their stories, and even all the students—you guys made coming to class easy and made it worth being here every step of the way.

Finally, I want to thank me for pushing forward and never giving up. Even when times were hard, I still pushed forward.



TIDA DRAMMEH

First things first, I would like to thank the Odyssey team for picking me to be in the program. I was very nervous when I first got the call from Emily saying that I'm in the program. At first, I didn't

know how to feel because what if I waste their time and resources? But after the first class, I knew I was in the right place. The Monday evening tutoring classes helped me so much to succeed and better understand what I was learning. I want to thank everyone here because without them I don't think I would even be graduating here with a passing grade. Thank you for making me leave my comfort zone and get out of my shell to read in front of the class and for everything Odyssey has made me become.

Secondly, I want to thank my young one because without her I don't think I would take education seriously or care where I work or where to go next. But with little ones, it's not just you: you have to think about them and not just yourself. With little ones, every decision you make matters because

they are looking up to their parent to lead them in a positive direction and to a good future. Whatever decision or step I take, I make sure it includes my little one for a better future.



DESTINY DRONE

Where do I start? This road I've taken was a road to resilience. I've been the girl that has gotten close to the end of crossing the finish line but tripped over my steps in the process, setting me back

to the LAST PLACE or even becoming injured and not being able to complete the race. But THIS race, I'm in first place!!! I took out every obstacle that was placed to destroy me.

I thank Emily for opening the door to allow my foot to be placed in the race. I thank Kevin for all the help he has given me on Monday night tutoring. I thank all the other staff members for helping, but most importantly I thank the Junior staff for being patient and supportive of my autistic son and helping with my two girls. Odyssey has opened their arms to my family, and I couldn't have gotten this far without everyone. Thank you, thank you! Your girl did it. Momma, I did it again!!



KIANA GALLOWAY

I want to start by thanking God for this opportunity. I would also like to thank the Odyssey Program and all of the people who work for it. I especially want to thank Emily for giving me a chance.

The Odyssey Program provided a warm learning environment, dinner, child care, tutoring, and so many more resources to help me grow and push me in the direction of being the best version of myself. I also want to thank my fiancé for supporting me every step of the way and for helping me with homework and for always encouraging me. This is the first time in my life that I have been surrounded by so much love and support.

**TIKOJA GILMER**

First things first, I want to give all thanks and glory to God. I'm so very happy and proud of myself for stepping out on faith and a calling God gave me. I want to thank my friends and family who spoke

positively in my ear about taking the class but also for helping me with my son when attending class. I thank Emily for giving me the opportunity to join the class and being picked from so many applicants.

I've dreamed so much for my life, and the opportunity to join Odyssey gave me more assurance that I'm still able to make those dreams happen. Being a single mother of an autistic son, I felt for so long I had to put a hold on my dreams. But this showed me I'm more of a super woman than I actually thought. I will show him he can achieve all things with faith, education, patience, and help.

**LARRY GRANT**

I am confident in myself. I understand that knowledge is power. Trust in yourself and be strong. Tell yourself you can do it. Sometimes we get discouraged and want to give up, but it is better to keep

going. Think about how your mind was before you joined the Odyssey Project.

**ANTEIJAH GREER**

This journey didn't just educate me, it revealed me. I am someone who refuses to quit, even when life feels overwhelming. During one of the most difficult seasons of my life, I kept showing up. I

chose growth over fear, faith over doubt, and perseverance over defeat. Odyssey didn't just change the way I think; it strengthened my confidence and helped me realign with who I truly am.

I am resilient. I am determined. I am capable of more than I once believed.

With the support of an incredible team beside me, I found power and courage within myself. Every challenge became a reminder that I am stronger than any obstacle placed in my path.

Crossing this finish line represents more than completion – it reflects my heart, my discipline, and my refusal to give up on myself.

This is who I am: evolving, confident, and unstoppable. "She remembered who she was, and the game changed."

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.





SHATAYA HALL

First, I would like to thank Emily. Thank you for choosing me to be a part of The Odyssey Project and for believing in me. Thank you for listening to my story and seeing something in me that

even I did not see before you ever even saw me in class. Kevin, Christine, Em, Katie, Sarah, Brian, especially Duke, and all the teachers at Odyssey: Thank you all for believing in us all and being there for us.

Second, I would like to thank my kids, DeMar, Nyjah and Genny. If motivation was a person, it would be you three. Your constant reminders to keep my faith, to be patient, and to know that God only gives his strongest soldiers the toughest battles keep me going. You are the reason I keep going.

To my mom, you ask me each Wednesday how class was, and that lets me know that you care; one does not have to scream the loudest for the other to know that they are cheering them on. Thank you for all your support these last few months and for putting up with all the leftovers in the fridge every Wednesday night.

To my classmate, y'all are one of a kind! I love how you all are not afraid to speak your mind and state facts. The seriousness, Laura's jokes, Shelton's loud laugh, Destiny's contagious smile, Kharmen's passion, Tikoya and Shakila's courage, Lilibeth, Paola and Lisa's kind, sweet souls, Richard, Viwe and George's dedication: these are just a few of the many, many things I could say about everyone in the best Odyssey class. So again, thank you to everyone. Class, continue to work toward your dreams and goals: they are only an arm's reach away!



JACQUELINE MCGEE HAWKINS

First, I would like to thank God for waking me up every morning and giving me breath in my lungs. Then I would like to thank my children and grandchildren, who were one

of the main reasons I applied for this class so I could show them that it is never too late.

I would also like to thank the staff at Odyssey. I never would have imagined that a group of strangers, who soon became family, would care so much and take their spare time to help individuals like myself. Thank you so much. I truly love and appreciate each and every one of you.

I would also like to thank my cousins/sisters, Salina Newton and Katrina Newton, and my cousin Romanus Newton, who would not let me give up, for all the late-night inspirational conversations. I also want to thank my beloved Monique Lee and Kesha Hawkins for all the words of encouragement and the smiles every time I called. They always answered.

I would also like to thank Lasandra Brown and Felicia Jenkins for always calling and checking on me.

I feel like I'm a part of something big, and I can't stop now.



I would also like to thank my coworker, Charles Jackson. We worked side by side every day, and through everything I was going through, he was always there. I know I probably came in some days with an attitude and may have taken my frustrations out on him, but he always responded with patience, a smile, and support. Thank you, Charles, for being there for me and my girls. I truly appreciate you.

Last of all, I want to thank my friend/sister, Tracy Lyons Fugate, for all her prayers. I truly do not know where I would be if it was not for her and her love for God.

Today is also my brother's birthday. He passed away a few months ago, so as I celebrate this graduation and the beginning of a new chapter in my life, I also honor him. Rest in peace, big brother. I love you. God bless you.

Thank you to everyone who believed in me and supported me along the way.



BRITTANY HUGHES

I would like to thank God and the entire Odyssey program for giving me this opportunity. I am also grateful for my teachers for their guidance and support throughout this journey. Most importantly, I

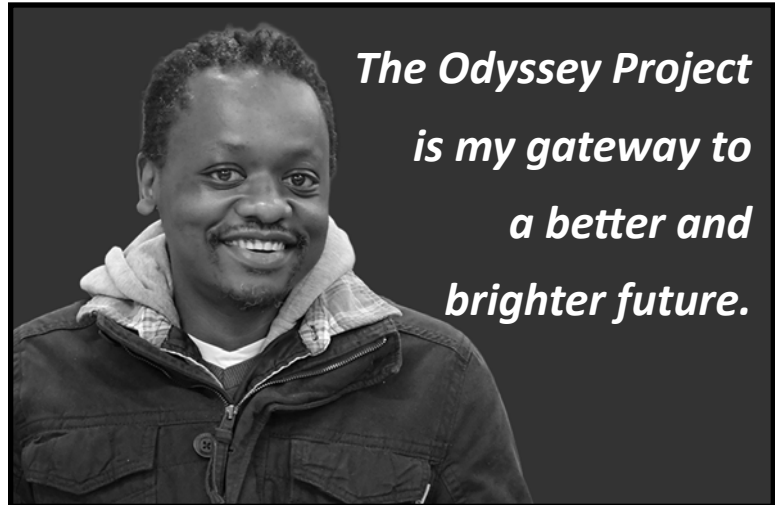
thank my children for being my motivation. This accomplishment is for them and the future we are building.



ANGEL MARIA MOORE

I begin by thanking God for the strength to press forward through every obstacle that came to block my path. With deep gratitude to the entire Odyssey Project family – the professors who believed in us,

alumni who poured in encouragement, dedicated



tutors, and my inspiring classmates who motivated me every Wednesday.

Special thanks to my loving family, especially my persistent “little big” sister and my daughter who never gave up on me! Above all, profound appreciation to Emily Auerbach and her family, who stand behind and before her in unwavering support.

Today, I stand where I'm meant to be but I'm moving up higher. Thank you, Odyssey Project, for this transformative journey!



VIWE MPURWANA

I would like to thank the Odyssey Project for giving me a second chance at attaining my dreams. Emily saw something in me that I had forgotten I had, and she has pushed me to be the version

of myself that I want to be. To the staff at Odyssey, thank you for your selfless and unrelenting support of not only myself but also my fellow classmates.

To my fellow classmates, thank you for showing up every week and making this journey a memorable one. I cannot imagine going through this journey with any other group of individuals. As we go our separate ways, know that you have a brother in your corner, always there, who believes in you. I see each and every one of you.



SHELTON D. MURPHY

You always must start by thanking the creator for aligning the stars and for giving me this opportunity and motivating me to further my education. The program is truly an Odyssey adventure of

its own, with the campus being the ship and the classmates and staff being my shipmates. Well, the staff are more like guardian angels because they always try to find a solution to your problems. They help you awaken dormant skills that you didn't know had. Some of the classmates become new best friends that you never knew you had. All in all, the Odyssey is truly a gift that you shouldn't take for granted. I would say it is the definition of what you would call giving back to the community. And this is something that our own government hasn't learned to do, so thank you, Odyssey, for leading by example.



ROCHÉ PALMER

Thank you for all that you guys have done and provided for not only my son and me but for previous graduates as well. No one person told me about Odyssey;

the community did. I know numerous people who successfully completed Odyssey and then some. I heard people I don't even know talking about Odyssey. I have seen ads on social media and the internet. But something drove me to finally apply this year, and I am over grateful that I did.

Odyssey is nothing like I imagined. I thought this was a typical college class, but I was in for an utter awakening—a beautiful one at that. I was welcomed by Emily and the other staff as well. They were so welcoming and helpful. I will be forever grateful for assistance and reassurance throughout the program.



RONCAL L. RILEY

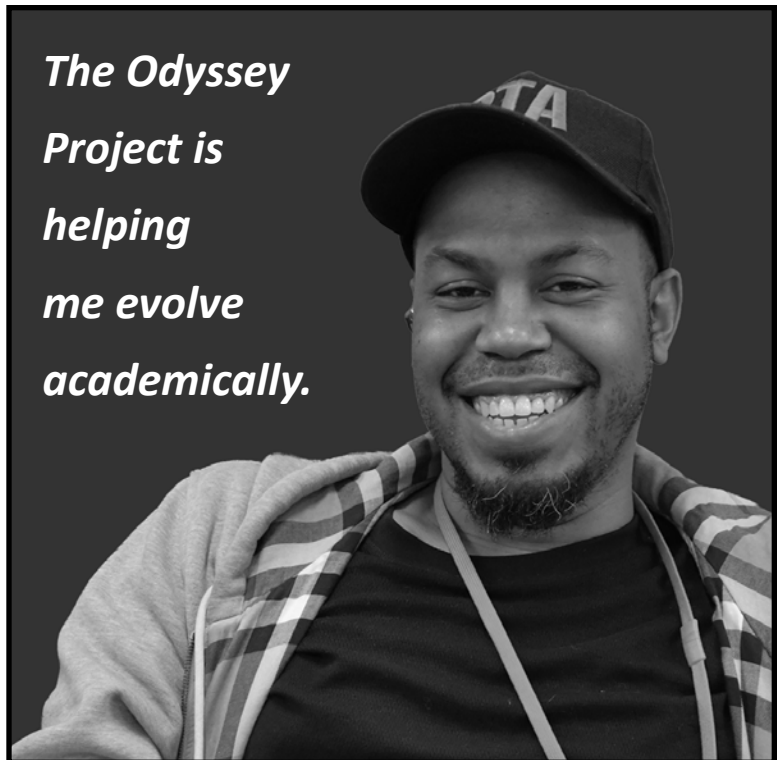
To the Odyssey Program, the staff, and our amazing teacher, Mrs. Emily: I want to take a moment to truly thank you all from the bottom of my heart. These past seven months have meant more to

me than words can fully express. When I first started this journey, I was going through one of the hardest seasons of my life. As a mother of three daughters, I was trying to hold everything together while also figuring out how to build a better future for my family.

There were moments when life felt overwhelming, and honestly, I don't know where my girls and I would be today without the support and opportunities this program gave us. Odyssey didn't just provide a program or classes; it provided hope, stability, and a community that truly cared.

The encouragement, patience, and unconditional support from the staff made a difference in ways you may never fully realize. You didn't just see me as another student. You saw me—as a person, as a

***The Odyssey
Project is
helping
me evolve
academically.***



mother, and as someone capable of achieving more even during difficult times. That kind of support is something I will never forget.

I would also like to give a special thank you to Brian Benford ... for being there during some of my hardest days. When I was overwhelmed and crying about my grandmother's cancer, you took the time to sit with me, listen, and even to share your own experience. You happened to make me laugh right after, which was needed. Your kindness, understanding, and support truly meant more to me than words can express.

Because of this program, I was able to keep pushing forward even when things around me felt uncertain. Knowing that there were people who believed in me gave me the strength to keep showing up, keep learning, and keep fighting for a better future for my daughters.

I also want to thank you for the impact this program has had on my daughters. As a mother,

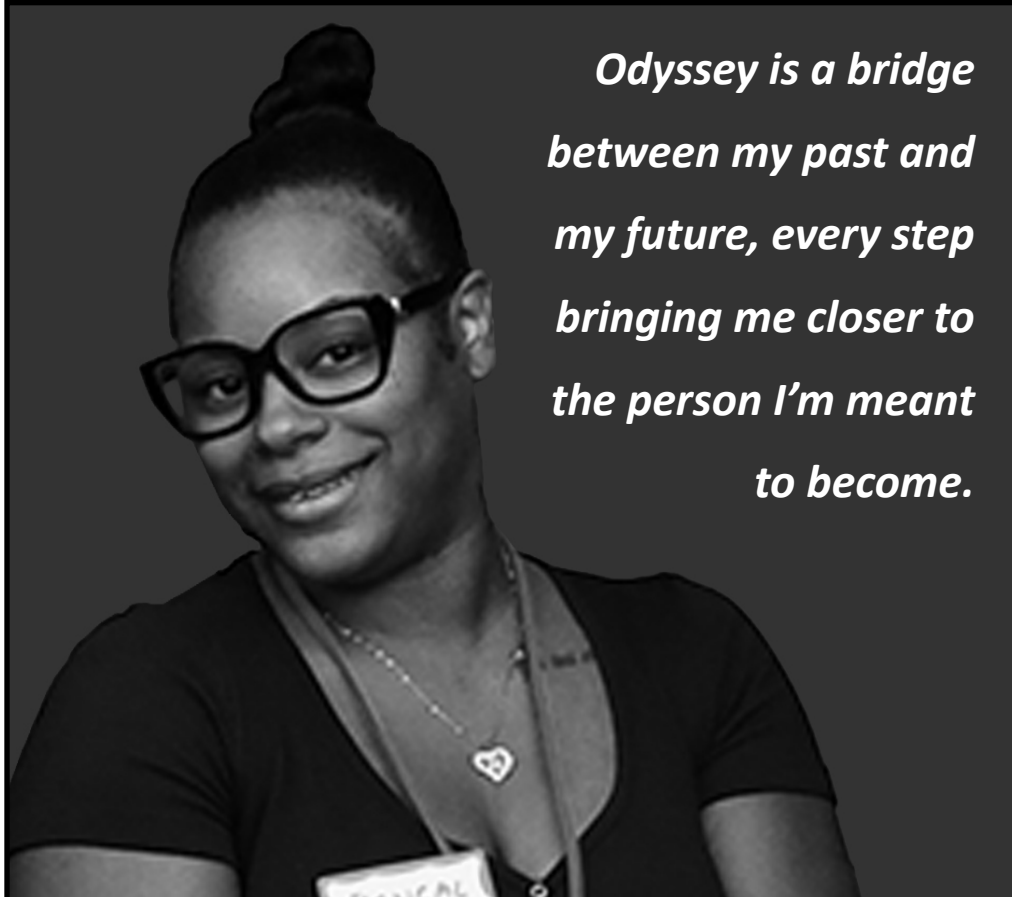
everything I do is for them. There were moments during these past seven months where I worried about how I was going to keep everything together, but because of this program, my girls were able to see their mother keep going, keep learning, and keep striving for a better future. They watched me show up even on hard days, and that is something I will always be grateful for. You didn't just support me - you supported my children by helping their mother build strength, confidence, and hope for our future.

My girls are watching me, and because of Odyssey they get to see their mother growing, learning, and striving for something greater. That alone means everything to me. I am truly grateful for every staff member who took the time to encourage me, listen to me, and support me along this journey. Your kindness, dedication, and belief in your students make a lasting impact that goes far beyond the classroom.

Please know that the work you do truly changes

lives. It changed mine and it impacted my daughters as well. Thank you for believing in me, for encouraging me when I needed it most, and for giving my family an opportunity that we will forever be thankful for. Years from now when my daughters ask how our lives began to change, Odyssey will always be a part of that story.

To my mother, Ronetta Jones, sister, Alyana Bufford, grandmother, Blanch "Lisa" Jones (my warrior), and my kids, Nylah, Nazilah, and Nazari (my world), you are my motivation group! I have the deepest gratitude and respect.





LILIBETH SOBREVILLA

I would like to start off by thanking Odyssey staff and Odyssey Junior staff for their unconditional support and love and for the patience and conversations we had that

made me feel like my kids and I mattered. The smiles and hellos slowly chipped away at my anxiety and helped me become more confident, until I began smiling the moment I walked in the door with a sense of belonging. I want to give special thanks to Emily for accepting me as her student and giving me a safe place to become the best version of myself.

I want to thank Kevin, Char, Brian, Christine, Gwen, and Ben for all the talks, help, and advice you gave me. Shoutout to all the tutors— I do not know what I would have done without your help. I want to thank you for allowing me to share my world with you no matter what that looked like. Thank you for always showing up to help us and motivating me through my writer's block. Thank you for the much-needed conversations and the time you dedicated to us. I am and will forever be grateful for each and every single person (tutor) that showed up to help us. Thank you!!!

Through Odyssey, I was able to find a community full of love, laughter, and friendship. Thank you, Odyssey, for giving me the most amazing classmates that have become wonderful friends. Thank you to my classmates for never judging me and always supporting me. Thank you for your courage, inspiration, and motivation you have given me through your writing and in person. My dear classmates, you have made my experience in Odyssey memorable; 10/10 I would definitely recommend. I wish nothing but success for each and every one of you. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your journey, and know that you can always count on me now or in the future—you will always have a friend in me!



*I see a new future
for my family
since joining the
Odyssey Project.*

To my sister Roxie, I love you more than you know! Thank you for pushing me to apply to Odyssey, and I will give it you “you were right, this time!” Thank you for support throughout my journey in Odyssey and helping me when I needed it. Thank you for listening and motivating me when I felt down on myself. You are the best big sister ever!!! Te quiero mucho, Hermana.

Querida Mama, hoy quiero darte las gracias por todo lo que has hecho por mí y también mis hijos. Gracias por cada sacrificio que hiciste en silencio y por el amor incondicional que me diste en cada paso del camino. Sobre todo, por tener paciencia de escucharme desahogarme y hablar sin parar. Gracias a tu ejemplo y Fortaleza, hoy soy la mujer fuerte y valiente. No se que haría sin ti. Te quiero mucho, MAMA!

I want to thank my stepdad for being there even though he is far away. Thank you for always checking in on me and making sure I made it home safe. Thank you for checking on the weather and making sure I was always prepared. Love you and appreciate all that you do.

Gracias mi querido esposo, se que el peso de cuidarnos ha significado mas sacrificio para ti, y no pasa desapercibido. Aceptaste trabajar mas duro y hacer sacrificios enormes para que a los niños y a mí no nos falta nada. Tu amor incondicional es lo que me da la fuerza para seguir adelante. Eres un esposo y un padre increíble y me siento muy afortunada de tenerte a mi lado. ¡Te amo!

Thank you to everyone in my life for accepting me as I am—loving me for me. Thank you to my kids for being the ember of hope that fueled my fire. Your unconditional love was the light I needed in the dark, and it is because of you I never gave up!! I love you more than words can say!

I am Lilibeth Sobrevilla, a proud daughter, a supporting sister, a devoted wife, a loving mother, and genuine friend—I have learned to fully embrace every piece that makes me who I am—and to love myself. Thank you, Odyssey! It is an honor to be a part of the Odyssey Project and to become an Odyssey alum from the Class of 2026!!!!



JUJU STALLWORTH

I made it!! I did that! You see your sister? John, I kept my promise to you. The sky is the limit, brother, and your sister is just getting started. Thank you for

always believing in me and encouraging me to see my potential. You carried me through this program, brother!

This achievement is more than just a milestone; it's a testament to the journey I've taken through Odyssey. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity this program has given me, opening doors I never thought possible. A heartfelt thank you to Emily and Kevin and all the staff whose encouragement and guidance as my teachers was invaluable. Their support helped me believe in myself when it mattered most.

To my classmates, thank you for sharing this journey with me and for the countless moments that made this experience unforgettable.

Before joining the program, I was uncertain about my future. Now I stand with confidence, free of doubt, ready to embrace what lies ahead. This program didn't just equip me with knowledge; it transformed how I see myself and my potential. I am proud of how far I've come, and I look forward to the future with excitement and assurance. This is not just a graduation; it's a celebration of growth, perseverance, and newfound confidence. I'm so grateful for the opportunity and for you all believing in me.

A special thanks to my boyfriend for always having encouraging words when I felt overwhelmed. You always know what to say to keep me pushing. Thank you to my mother and father for always believing in my dreams. To my oldest daughter, I can't praise and thank you enough for always speaking life into me and seeing more in me than I see in myself. I'm forever grateful that you are a part of me.

To every one of you: y'all helped me to rewrite my future, the makings of Juju! I won't let any of you down.



**GEORGE G. SYDNOR**

For me, Odyssey was a big part of my everyday life. I was always excited to be here to see my fellow students. Every teacher here was willing to help me. I would like to thank Emily Auerbach for always

being on me to write more and get to tutoring on Mondays, Kevin for always answering my call or any question I ever had, and my mom for being here for me, encouraging me to get to class.

Odyssey made me strive for more, be a better me, and never give up. It's okay to be nervous because in the end it is a successful outcome for my future. I thank my class as well for always telling me to get up, for really making sure I didn't fall off track, and for encouraging me to make it to graduation. Now we are all here walking across the stage together. Odyssey Class of 2026: we are all great together to make a better future.

**SHANEECE MICHELLE TAYLOR**

This program has been a blueprint for individual and communal transformation. I can say with assurance that every participant is completing Odyssey as a

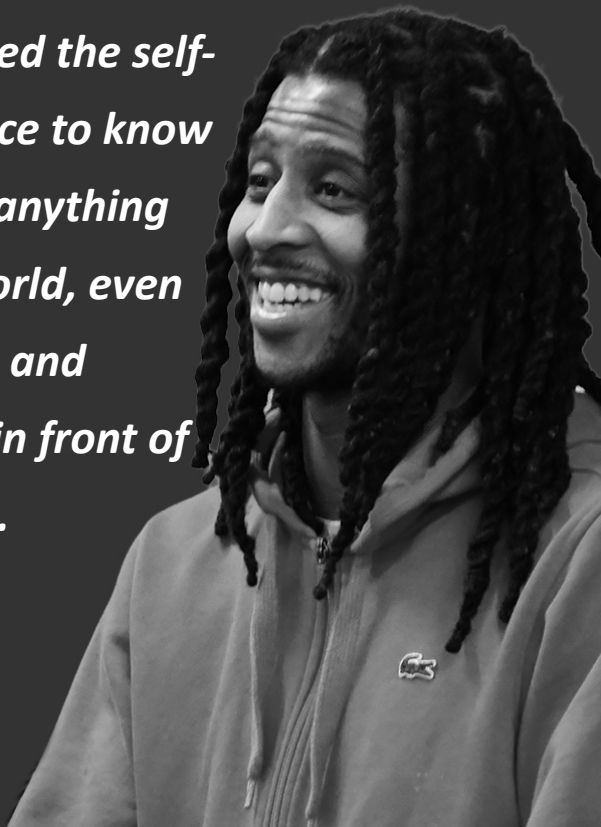
revitalized version of themselves. Emily, Kevin, Brian, and the Odyssey staff who've made an impact on me or my daughter's lives – THANK YOU! We are grateful to have had you join our village and we love you as family.

**JOSEPH R. THIGPEN JR.**

First, I'd like to thank my kids for giving me the drive and ambition to wake up and never quit. Second, I have to applaud myself for staying focused and determined to finish the program strong.

When I first applied for Odyssey, I knew the program was for me and by destiny I was chosen. Odyssey, thank you for selecting me to be involved in the program. This opportunity motivated me to get back enrolled in Madison College and pursue an education degree.

I've gained the self-confidence to know I can do anything in the world, even standing and reading in front of the class.

**KHARMEN THOMAS**

When I first walked into class, it was slightly intimidating because of social barriers. I adjusted

and opened up and just went for it, and part of me often questions that decision. I got better, though. Shelton became my point person over time; he challenged me intellectually. I've strived to educate myself because my family

emphasized the importance. I often shrunk down in social settings because being educated was weaponized and became a double-edged sword, making me socially ostracized.

I'm not someone who was just afforded the opportunity to have access to education. Much like Malcom X, I was self-taught. I walked around with a notebook and pen and wrote down and researched anything I didn't understand. Most of my days were spent reading.

I heard about the program and decided to join. The world around me was in another "once in a lifetime" in my lifetime. That had a point of taking its toll mentally and emotionally, and it was hard to push through. Emily worked with me to get to the end. I'm thankful for her and everyone that was a part of my success as a support system. In spite of challenges, you have to find what keeps you pushing because you come out a better version of yourself. Plus, they won't let you quit, but it's all from a place of love.



SHAKILA WOODS

First, I want to thank God for his grace and mercy and for igniting a fire in me I didn't even know was still there. I want to thank Emily and the staff for supporting me and helping me feel like I belong again. Odyssey gave my kids and me something positive to look forward to. To my babies – Zamauri, Zyrie, Zaniya, and Zion – thank you for being my why and for your patience and love through it all. Thank you to my mom for her support and to Shante for her prayers and encouragement. To my family and friends, thank you for always standing by me. I also want to honor my granny and sister Candice. I expected y'all to witness this, but your love and strength carried me through. And lastly, a special shoutout to myself for not giving up, for staying the course even through hard times, and for showing up when it wasn't easy. I'm proud of me.



Odyssey reminds me that my voice matters, that I am capable, that I can succeed, and that I do belong. Odyssey teaches the art of advocating for yourself, allowing your inner voice to be free, no longer whispering to survive but speaking to arrive.

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.

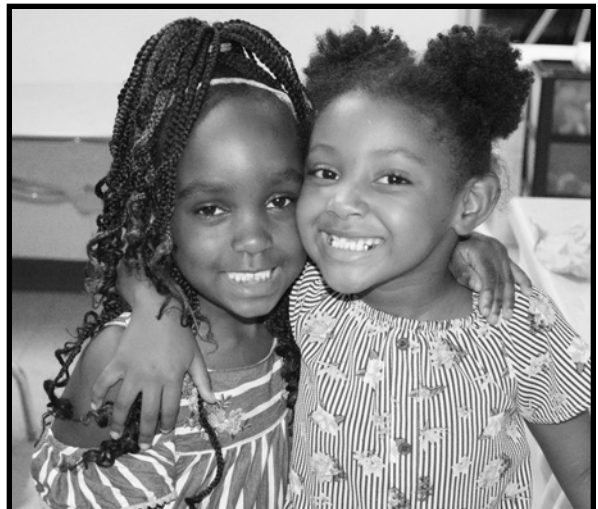


ONWARD ODYSSEY

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 journey.

ODYSSEY JUNIOR

Through a weekly arts and literacy 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 their parents are in class, children participate in curricula and activities 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. Via writing or speaking, students create individual stories, read brief samples from autobiographical writings by Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, and others, engage in prompts designed to trigger memories, and publish an Odyssey Senior Oracle making history come alive.



ODYSSEY BEYOND WARS

For two years starting in Fall 2023, Odyssey Beyond Wars served veterans who were challenged by their transition from military to civilian life, were looking for an engaged community of peers, and wanted a jump start in furthering their education. All military veterans—regardless of time in service, deployment history, disability status, or discharge status—were encouraged to apply. Graduates earned six transferable college credits in English at no cost and without using any VA benefits. Due to personnel changes and budget cuts, this program has paused for strategic planning during the 2025-2026 academic year.

In addition to the above 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 programs and the Family Learning Center, contact Emily Auerbach at emily.auerbach@wisc.edu or 608-262-3733.

LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2027

Dear Class of 2027,



Congratulations and welcome to the beginning of the rest of your life. Believe the hype: Odyssey is everything they say it is and more! Show up, make it a priority, and give it your all. If I can do it, you are more than capable. We all have big things going on in our lives, but I promise you, Odyssey can be your safe space if you let it. It was my break from the world every Wednesday! Believe in yourself! You were **CHOSEN** out of over 100 applicants. You were meant to be here. This is your calling and the fuel to your fire you needed!
(Laura Bass)



CONGRATULATIONS! You've made it into the Odyssey class of 2027! This is a time to feel honored and proud because out of over 100 applicants, you were chosen. I know you may feel a mix of emotions. When I was in your seat, I felt excited, anxious,

and somewhat afraid of failing. However, I'm telling you there's no need to have any fear of failing because Emily, Kevin, and the rest of the Odyssey staff are dedicated to seeing you succeed. This program is life changing, so be sure to soak up all the knowledge you can. Good luck—you've got this! Love to you. **(Serene Boyd)**

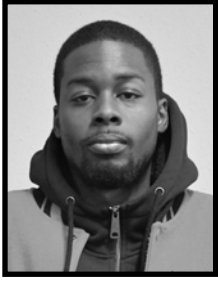


I'm sure you're sitting here with awkward stares, uncomfortable silence, and uncertainty lingering. Trust me when I tell you those feelings won't last long. The strangers you're sitting with will soon become family. I challenge you all to open your mind and hearts to the Odyssey Project and let it work its magic. You will be challenged, but with that comes encouragement and support. Mrs. Emily, Kevin, and the entire staff only want to see you succeed. Try your best to not let self-doubt, adversities, or others deter you from achieving your dreams, goals, and aspirations.



This journey is eye opening and one to make your own. There's not one right way to do it. From English Lit, Philosophy, History, Art, and more, you will find something new in each class.

As I close, I say welcome to the Odyssey Family! Let your guard down and pour into your futures! I promise you won't regret it. **(Lisa Brown)**



My words to you are be prepared! Be present! I would also say as a heads up: be yourself!

Coming into Odyssey, expect to be challenged. This will be something I'm sure you will enjoy. I say this because coming into the class, I started out nervous about if I even had what it takes to be in the class or if I would finish. I knew it was a lot of what I didn't know, but all my teachers supported me like crazy, and I came out with a lot learned. You will find yourself reading more, thinking more critically, and craving more knowledge.

I fell behind a lot with my homework, but thanks to the childcare Odyssey provided me with and the tutoring sessions they had every Monday, I was able to sometimes catch up more than I probably would have without. Don't worry: once you feel overwhelmed, your teachers and classmates are there and will help, support, and guide you through. All you have to do is ask for help or talk to one another. After the first class I knew I would love Odyssey, but as of now, one month from graduation, I can surely say the expectation I had for Odyssey was majorly surpassed.

Don't give up! Don't quit!

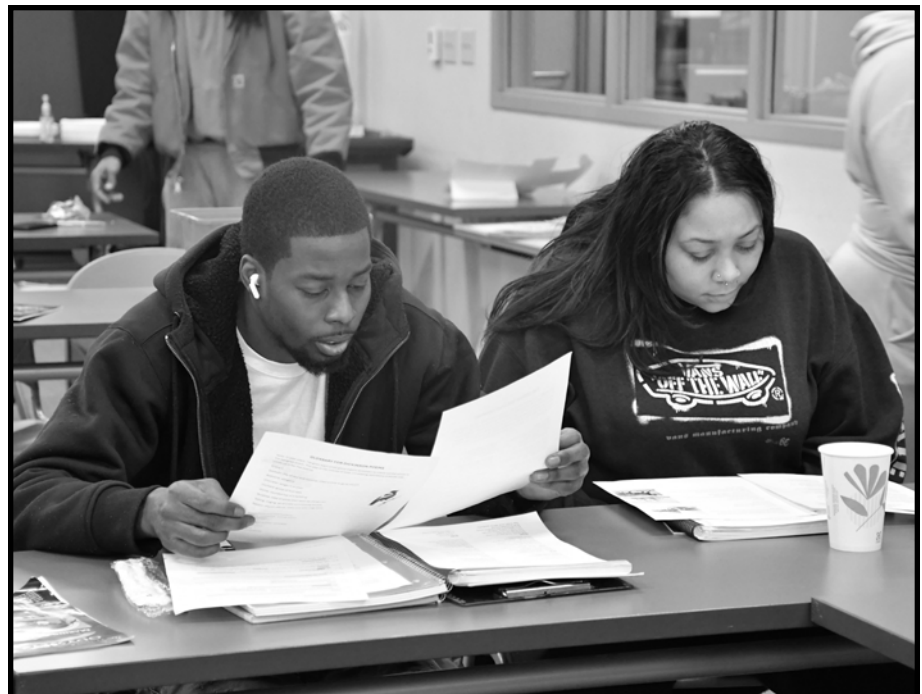
You will make it if that's what you want. You will soon find out all your teachers will want you to make it just as much as yourself. Besides the work I learned from while doing homework and school work in class, I also learned to speak up and use my voice outside of Odyssey. I was taught to speak up, be loud, and be heard. Read the policy! That's a joke that basically means do your homework. Get it? Laughing out loud! I had to use that at work. All and all, good or bad, whatever you may go through during your time with Odyssey, it's going to be

a great learning experience for you. You will enjoy your time there, and there will be much to learn and to do. I'm rooting for all of you to do great. Stay ready and you might not have to get ready. I'm proud of you in advance! **(Richard Butler)**



I truly believe everything happens for a reason. I had the opportunity to continue my education through the Odyssey program, which I only learned about from a colleague at my job. At first, the thought of loading my plate with two jobs and the pressure of becoming a single mom felt extremely discouraging. But as I always say, "you never know until you try." Well, here I am, two semesters later and closer to my goal. The Odyssey program has helped me in unimaginable ways, such as the extremely resourceful, educational, and emotional help. I was able to open up to strangers (my classmates) who had similar stories to me. I've never felt so comfortable and welcomed in a space where we all strive to become our best.

I deeply encourage you to load your plate and push yourself beyond your limits because at Odyssey, there is always a way! **(Stacy Castillo)**





I want to start off by saying I was all of you on my first day: quiet, nervous, and scared. I didn't know what to expect. I want to congratulate you all for making it and getting accepted into Odyssey. They take 30 out of 100, and you got accepted: look at God already working his ways for you. I believe in you. I didn't have the courage, but look at me now. You will graduate, you will succeed, you will complete, you will overcome your scares, and you will accomplish everything you want in life. Congratulations, my 2027 Odyssey family.
(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)



When I applied for the Odyssey Project for the second time after being denied, I was filled with nerves – unsure if I was smart enough, unsure if I belonged. But when we took the field trip to campus to get our IDs, being on campus and feeling that energy, something shifted. I saw a future I never dared to imagine. Now I'm on this path – enrolled in college, pursuing my dreams at a HBCU – and I feel stronger every day.

Remember as you walk this journey to take your time and give yourself grace. Take care of yourself. Self-love is just as vital as ambition. I can't wait to see all that you accomplish; this is just the beginning.

Welcome to the Class of 2027. The hard part is over; you've come this far! Remember nothing is more powerful than you. And I'm with you.
(Valencia Collins)



WELCOME into your new adventure...an Odyssey, if you will. I hope that coming in you guys are prepared to learn new things, join a new community, and have fun while doing it all. Coming into this program I was so nervous and didn't know what

to expect. Being here with Emily, Kevin, Christine, and ALL the staff has been amazing. They helped every step of the way. I mean every step of the way. Whether it was helping with homework, kids, food, or even just being a listening ear, they were amazing.

I know each of you is walking in with your own life issues. Let this be a safe space for you, and let Odyssey and the staff help you and guide you like it did us and the ones before us. I am very grateful to have been a part of this journey. I want to thank all the staff for making sure that we got all of the resources that we needed to succeed—to watching our babies, to just being that listening ear. This class made me so proud to be a part of because even on days when we didn't want to show up because life was kicking our butts, we did. We showed up and contributed even through all the trials and tribulations. We all took that first step to becoming a better us, and that all started with Odyssey. This became a part of my life, and I will miss coming here religiously every Wednesday.

I also want to take the time to say, PLEASE GO TO TUTORING ON MONDAYS! Kevin and his team of tutors are great! Free food and childcare are something you can't beat! It helped so much in getting my work done and also getting caught up when I fell behind.

To this next class
I want to wish
you all the best!
I hope you all
enjoy being here
as much as I did.
I hope Odyssey
pushes you to
do the things
you have been
wanting to do
but haven't
done. I hope it
gives you the
confidence to
get back into
school and
chase your
dreams!
Congratulations
on being here!
(Paola Damiani)



Dear Class of 2027, make sure you give it your absolute best. There's no way one could fail a class with all the support system it comes with. Take advantage of all the resources Odyssey has to offer, and the two semester classes will go by fast with the

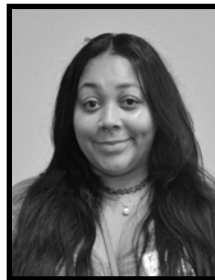
best grades possible. Make sure to come to class on time and actually do the work. If you are stuck, Emily's always got your back. But be sure to ask for help when you need it, don't stay quiet, and please ask anyone on the staff for help. They are all here for you, and they are all here to make sure you succeed. (Tida Drammeh)



Welcome to CHANGE ... I say change because indeed your life is about to change, for the better!

When I applied, I didn't know it was me against 100+ other applicants all trying to win a spot

in a life changing opportunity. Now look at you!!! You are in my shoes: you were chosen. Emily chose you. Scream, cry, clap, express every emotion because, tie your shoes, this isn't a walk in the park, but I promise you'll walk that stage with a reborn version of yourself and with resilience and strength in your walk. 2027 is your year!!! Congratulations, everyone!! (Destiny Drone)



In this program, you will find your love for learning, you will hear captivating stories, and you will be challenged to think intellectually. It is such a blessing to be chosen for this program, so consider yourself blessed even if you never have before! Emily and

Kevin care so deeply about you and your success, so take this opportunity seriously and take everything you can learn from it! This is just the beginning! You will come out of the program feeling so proud of yourself. You can do this! I believe in you, too! Welcome to Odyssey! (Kiana Galloway)



Welcome to your new beginning. You may be feeling nervous, scared, and a little out of place, but this space is going to become something so familiar. It will be a place you will miss once the countdown starts to take place.

For the first month I barely opened my mouth. Towards the end I was volunteering to read and act parts out loud to the class. I pray that this time in this class opens up your mind and confidence and inspires you to continue on and accomplish goals.

You may feel overwhelmed, but push through, ask for help, and stay determined. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**



Welcome, Class of 2027!

You chose Odyssey because you believe that you're ready to change. You have a plan, and most importantly you're willing to learn. This program is for you. There is a lot of excitement and

fun. I hope by joining the Odyssey Project this brings you peace and much success. **(Larry Grant)**



Welcome to Odyssey!

You did not arrive here by accident.

Something within you is ready to grow, to learn, and to rise.

Trust the path ahead, even when it challenges you.

Within you already live the strength, the courage, and the wisdom needed for this journey.

Step forward with an open mind and willing heart.

Support one another and believe in yourself. Also remember that every step you're taking is shaping the person you are becoming.

This is your NEW beginning. **(Antejah Greer)**



Hey, y'all, heyyy! Shataya here. Welcome to Odyssey.

Let me just say how happy I am for you for being chosen to be part of the Odyssey Project. Trust me when I say: you are going to love it. Mark my words.

During the first few weeks you might have thoughts like, "This is stupid," or "This isn't going to make a difference in my life," or even, "This isn't for me." Some of you might even think, "I'm not coming back next week." If that happens, just give it a few more weeks. Stay, keep showing up. I PROMISE you, you'll change your mind.

Let me tell you a little about the people here. Emily is amazing—she is super cool, a little savage (in the best way possible). Kevin, ohh Kevin, he is soo funny. Em and Sarah, them and that camera: they are going to get those pictures of you, so just go with it, lol. For real, you're going to love every teacher here, but more importantly, they're going to love and support you.

If you've ever felt like nobody was cheering for you, that is not the case here. The teachers here at Odyssey are your biggest cheerleaders; they are here for you and they believe in you. When I say



they truly want you to succeed, I mean that with every bone in my body.

Here's a little advice from someone who's been where you are sitting right now:

When Emily asks for volunteers to read a passage or a part in a play... DO IT. Even if you think you're not a good reader, or big words make you nervous like they did for me, Emily will simply help you with the word and you'll keep going. You will get better, and that is how. The first time might feel scary, the second time might feel awkward, but by the third time— you'll realize it's not so bad.

And when you get the chance to go on field trips—to plays, museums, or anywhere new—GO. Say yes to the experience, step outside your comfort zone, and try something you might never have done before. Some of the best memories come from moments you almost said no to.

My last piece of advice is this: speak up and use your voice. Your thoughts matter in this room and so do your ideas. In this class, there's no such thing as a wrong question or a wrong answer; there's only learning, growing, and discovering things about the world—AND about YOURSELF.

So welcome to Odyssey! Trust this process, and enjoy this journey. I promise, it's going to be worth it. **(Shataya Hall)**



Future Odyssey students, Welcome to the Odyssey program! As someone who has been where you are about to begin, I want you to know that this experience can truly change you in ways you may not expect.

When I first started, I did not realize how much this program would mean to me. Life was already heavy for me. I was going through a divorce, grieving the loss of my father and my brother, and trying to stay strong for my daughters while still finishing school. Some days it felt like everything around me was a storm. But coming to Odyssey on Monday and Wednesday nights became a place where I could breathe.

The staff here are more than instructors. They are encouragers. They listen, they care, and they truly want to see you succeed. During some of the hardest moments in my life, they showed compassion and patience, and that meant more to me than they probably know.

My classmates also became something very special to me. What started as a group of strangers slowly turned into something that felt like family. We supported each other, laughed together, and reminded one another that none of us were walking this journey alone.

Odyssey opened my mind, strengthened my confidence, and reminded me that it is never too late to grow, learn, and start a new chapter.

If I could give you one piece of advice, it would be this: stay committed, stay open, and lean on the people around you. There will be moments when the work feels challenging, but the growth you gain from it is worth every step.

Before you know it, you will be the ones writing a letter like this, looking back and realizing how far you have come. I wish you the very best on your journey.

(Jacqueline Hawkins)



When I first started, things were very overwhelming, I questioned if I could balance school, work, class, and being

a mother while also bringing a new baby into the world. The Odyssey Program made it easier for me with the love and support they provided. Lean on your teachers, classmates, and the resources they provide. Keep pushing forward even on the days it feels hard. Never forget where you started! You are capable of more than you think. Keep going! **(Brittany Hughes)**



Let curiosity be your compass and the instructors be your anchor.

By the end of your Odyssey, you'll look back and see not just how far you've come but also how much more of yourself has awakened. This is your time--walk boldly and confidently into it, with faith in your journey. **(Angel Maria Moore)**



Welcome to The Odyssey Project—a journey that will change how you see yourself and the world around you! When I first walked into that bright room on a September evening, I saw faces as nervous and hopeful as my own. The walls were lined

with stories, photos of graduates smiling with pride, words from those who came before us urging us to keep going. Those words lit a spark in me, and I hope this letter does the same for you.

You'll soon discover that Odyssey isn't just about books and lectures. It's about rediscovering your voice. It's the moment when a poem cracks open your heart, when a classmate's story reminds you that you are not alone, and when you realize your experience has power and value. You'll laugh, cry, question, and grow in ways that books alone can't teach!

There will be long nights and strong emotions. Life won't stop while you're in this program, but through it all, remember this: you belong here! Every essay, every conversation, every shared meal is part of building something bigger than yourself.



Firstly, be proud of yourself for making the first step towards your future. You simply being here, that's the first step accomplished, and now open yourself to the many possibilities which stand before you. Look around at your classmates: there

will be people who will become an important part of your community moving forward. You are all here for the same thing, to better your lives and the lives of your family.

Secondly, don't doubt yourself: Emily has the ability to see potential in people who don't even see it in themselves. The fact that you are here means she sees something in you, so show her. The seat you are sitting in was meant for you, so own it. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**

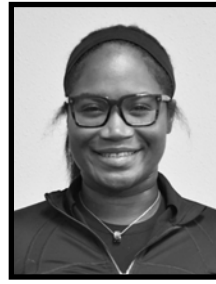


First off, I would like to say welcome to the Odyssey program, where you take the journey to learn yourself. It challenges you to go out of your comfort zone and forces you to build fundamental skills. It will challenge you at your most

challenging moments in life. And this is how you are forced to persevere and surpass your limits throughout the class year.

I encourage you to get to know your classmates because you might form some new unbreakable bonds. Make sure you work with the staff; they will be your beacons of light in your times of need. Each of them has their own lanes of resources for you to utilize. They try to make sure you and your children feel as comfortable as possible. By providing daycare, dinner, and transportation, they shocked me with their dedication to ensure we make it to school and graduate. And every week of class brings something different. We might head to the museum to study art. Or we might have a guest speaker talk about their ups and downs until they reached success.

One of my most enjoyable moments was when we read *A Raisin in the Sun* and then acted out the play. Soon you will start to awaken dormant skills that you thought that you never had. So my best advice I can give you is don't take the program for granted. Use it for what it is: a stepping stool to reach another level in life. Now I encourage you to complete the voyage and always be better than you were yesterday. In this world you only can go not as far as you can see but really how far as you can think. I wish you the best of luck, Class of 2027, and I hope you all strive for greatness.
(Shelton Murphy)



Welcome to Odyssey!! You guys are in for a ride!! A blessing in disguise!! I never expected to be where I am, sitting in these classrooms learning what I am learning, experiencing what I am experiencing. Please take advantage of this beautiful

opportunity!!

Welcome to Odyssey! **(Roché Palmer)**



You might feel like everyone is watching you, huh? Take a deep breath ... I promise you, most people are probably feeling the exact same way. In reality, this is going to be amazing. It might even end up being one of the best experiences you could ever

imagine.

Try not to think negatively. I know life issues and reality can make meeting new people feel uneasy or even frightening. I know that feeling because I was that student. I came in with a horrible start. I honestly didn't know how I was even going to make it to class.

But instead of giving up and letting the day crumble, my teachers gave me hope. They uplifted



me and reminded me that I have a story to tell. I have kids to provide for. I have little eyes watching me. Because of that, I knew I had to show up despite everything I was going through in life.



I was going to get to school, and everything else in between.

So, I'm a witness and a testimony! Whatever you put your mind to, you can do it. Just stay consistent and stay focused.

I told myself I'd figure the rest out later because right now I had the opportunity to be part of an amazing program.

Don't let fear be the reason you get in the way of becoming a better version of yourself.

The best thing you can do is listen, observe, and take in what the people around you are saying. Ease your way into becoming comfortable enough to speak your own truth without feeling judged. When I opened up, that's exactly what I found, a judgment-free zone. A village. A family. Everyone in this program welcomed me with open arms and a listening ear.

So never feel like you're alone. Once you get comfortable, you'll feel relieved and honored to share your story and let people know who you are.

Keep going. Life can really be life-ing; if you know, you know lol. But seriously, don't give up. Keep pushing. I don't care if tomorrow you feel like everything is falling apart, maybe you're homeless, maybe your car breaks down, maybe you're angry at the world. Take that anger and turn it into motivation. Use it to push forward and still show up to class.

Not only will you figure it out, but your village, your people here at Odyssey, will help you figure it out too. And I'm not just saying this because I love the program. I'm saying this because I lived it.

My car got repossessed on the first day of school. I have three daughters. I had to worry about how to get back to work, how to take them to school, how

Oh, and do your homework, lol. That's the biggest part.

Express yourself. Don't hold back. This is you versus you. It's not you versus your classmates, and it's not a race.

This journey is about patience, understanding, and learning. And don't ever be afraid to ask questions; they love questions.

One day you'll be the person writing a letter like this to the next class, telling them how you made it through. So, start your journey strong, stay focused, and never forget that you were chosen for a reason.

Overall, welcome to the start of a new class and the beginning of your new journey. Congratulations on being selected. I'm so proud of you. And you got this. **(Roncal Riley)**



Take a deep breath ... now exhale the worry, the doubts, and the unease. Allow yourself to feel what you're feeling. It's ok to cry, laugh, or stay quiet. Accept every raw emotion you're feeling with an open mind to listen and an appetite to learn. Be proud of

yourself and hold your head high because you have taken the first steps on your journey to your success. Simply being here, you have shown up for yourself, so don't give up because success looks good on you! **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**



Hey, Class of 2027, I know all of you are joining this class to better yourselves and your futures. Well, you already started your journey with the hardest part: signing up and being accepted. Welcome to Odyssey where you can shape and write your future.

The sky is the limit! You guys are going to be just fine.

I was in your shoes a year ago, scared of the unknown, thinking can I really do this? Don't worry: even if you doubt yourselves, now you just became a part of the Odyssey family and Emily is not gonna let you fail lol. She's going to get you right out of that mindset. The teachers here are going to encourage you and will believe in you even when you feel like you can't do it. With their support and encouragement, you will succeed, so relax and get ready for a journey!

Odyssey isn't just a program; it's a transformative journey where you'll discover your strengths, face challenges, and grow in ways you never expected. This is the beginning of an adventure that will shape not just your knowledge but also who you become. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



Hello, future Odyssey students. My time at the Odyssey program was a great experience

for me. They are here to help every student in the program to be successful. Every teacher here is hands on for you. I was nervous at first, even scared, but once you get in the groove, it's a wonderful experience. I wasn't really a writer in the beginning, but over time I learned writing is another way to express yourself.

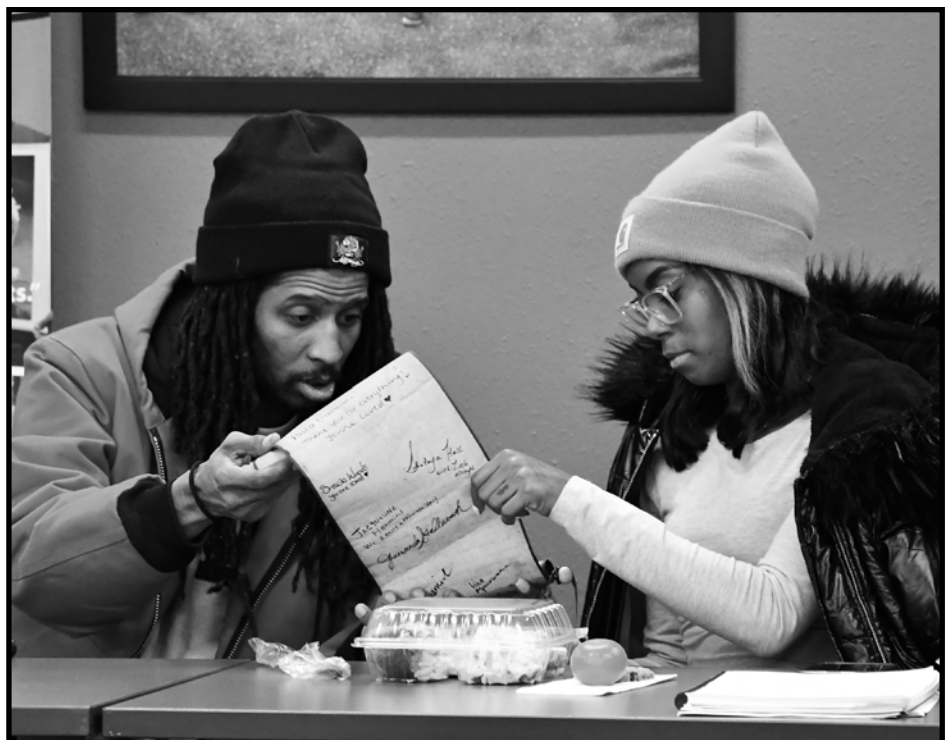
Being here was great. My kids loved it at Odyssey Junior and made new friends. My experience made me feel welcomed like a family. This is something that you can have for your future.

I faced a few obstacles in my everyday life, but every teacher here helped me to try to even make my life a little better with not as much stress. So, to all the new students, make the best of this experience for not only you but your family as well. Strive to be a better you. **(George G. Sydnor)**



Today is the first day of the rest of your life. You chose to spend it in a space and with a community of people who promote compassion, dedication, accountability, learning, and transformation. There will be ups and downs, highs and lows, good

times and bad times, etc. Know that this will not be a road that you travel alone. You are here for a reason, so always come back to that reason when you feel overwhelmed or burnt out. You have a bigger purpose. Allow this program to create the road for your dreams, and be ready to drive yourself to your destination. **(Shaneece Taylor)**





Get ready to enjoy every Wednesday of fall 2026 and spring 2027. This class will bring laughter, positive energy, and a bucket of love and support. The 29 classmates you have seem shy now, but by week five or six, you will feel more comfortable than

you feel now. Be ready to express yourself and step out of your comfort zone. Odyssey is a safe space. Everyone has a story to tell ... What's your story?

(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)



Welcome to Odyssey. Today you begin an opportunity to challenge yourself to embrace your diversity in the face of adversity. In this space you will reflect, grow, nurture, be vulnerable, and learn in many ways.

When our class entered, the world was trying to navigate humanity in crisis, as were we. This program became a safe haven for some. You can enter this space with more relaxed hypervigilance. Odyssey becomes so much more than just a class. I encourage you to be open and ask for help. Every one of the people there is invested in your success and will do their best to help you get there. The support doesn't just stop with you "getting

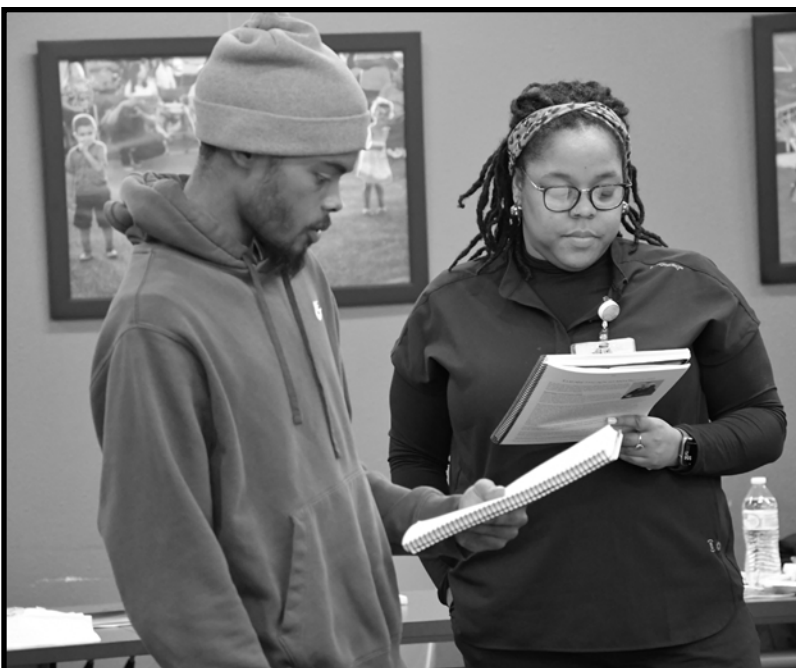
through" the class. This project was created by people that, much like you, have faced many challenges. This class is full of people who are next to you fighting an uphill battle. Your peers will become a family. Be open to new experiences. Take the opportunity to step outside the box and comfort zones.

If you don't have community, here's an opportunity to build family. Most of all, I want to tell you congratulations on taking this step toward a brighter future. With love I tell you to embrace this with an open mind. **(Kharmen Thomas)**



First, I want to say welcome and congrats on earning a spot in the Odyssey program. This journey you're about to begin is truly life changing. Get ready to explore parts of yourself you didn't even know existed. Right now, you might be sitting in your seat

feeling nervous, unsure of what's ahead. That's okay. In fact, that might be the first and last time you sit in your seat feeling that way. The next time you take your seat you will feel different. It will light a fire in you – the kind that pushes you to get up, go further, dream bigger, and believe in yourself in ways you never have before.



The staff will become the village you didn't know you needed. They will challenge you, support you, and remind you of your strength even on the days when you forget it yourself. Take a look around the room. Yes, the people sitting beside you: they're strangers today but will soon be family. They are the people who will witness your growth, celebrate your victories, and walk beside you through hard times during this season of life. I'm excited for what's ahead of you. Take everything in—every lesson—and give the program your all, no short cuts, no AI (in my Emily voice). Let the real you shine. The one with dreams, purpose, and light is exactly what the world needs. Trust the process! **(Shakila Woods)**

MEET THE ODYSSEY TEAM FOR 2025-2026

ODYSSEY 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: Ben Garrison

Odyssey Ambassador: Char Braxton '06

Oracle and Yearbook Designer: Beth Auerbach

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

Odyssey Teaching Faculty: Nidia Banuelos, Christy Clark- Pujara,

Baron Kelly, Gene Phillips, Sue Robinson, Ben Shannon, Craig Werner

Odyssey Partners and Guests: American Players Theatre (Patty Heaston, Sara Young); Bob Auerbach; Chazen Museum of Art (Berit Ness, Amy Gilmer); Forum Theatre (Kile Crosby, Vickie Eiden, Amanda Farrar, Ali Mansouri, Shruthi Menon, Molly Riedemann); Madison Opera; Overture Center; Rene Robinson '08; University Theatre; Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra (Regina Baiocchi, Bill Banfield, Xavier Foley, Eric Gould, Joe Loehnis, Andre Myers, Autumn Reed, Patrice Rushen)

Onward Odyssey Guests: Sara Alvarado, Brittany Books, Carlos Dávalos, Deborah Douglas, Ruchitae Ervin, Ros Faulkner, Eliot Finkelstein, Felica Harris, Sami Head, Jade Iseri Ramos, Erica Lancaster, Ali Muldrow, Jordan Roseske, Jen Rubin, Nate Schorr, Alex Stark Haffner, Jessica Sweazy, Robyn Wallin, Willie Watkins, Kevin Wilmott II



Odyssey Interns and Student Hourly Helpers: Clarissa Brown, Alex Gonzales, Anya Schulz

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

Class Meals: AAUW Monona-Madison, Bobbie Wang and Mary Circle/St. James Lutheran Church

Volunteer Tutors: Hannah Ashbach, Kate Bergum, Charles Czuprynski, Eleanor Dougherty, JD Duncan, Adam Ghouse, Erin Gold, Dan Gorman, Jeremy Holiday, Jonathan Hollander, Stanley Jackson, Lauren Kersten, Jay Lowe, Mara Beth Lueck, Seleata McDonald, Nancy Nemec-Griffen, Ella Piper Peterson, Carol Poore, Sujash Purna, Susan Robinson, Jen Rubin, Jennifer Sauer, Seth Umbaugh, Jacy Whitehead



ODYSSEY JUNIOR

Director: Karen Dreyfuss/Gwendolyn Coale

Odyssey Junior Teaching Staff and Volunteers: Lourdes Albarran Morales, Marlon Anderson, Ozanne Anderson ('08), Keena Atkinson ('10), Amy Basel, Angela Bazan, Lola Belchinsky, Aida Bouzit, Ron Buford ('20), Raquel Diaz, Cecilia Enriquez, K'Shawn Gibbs (Junior grad), Karla Holguín Espino, Latrice Johnson, Brenna Kelley, Morgan Kelley, Riley Lynch, Deshawn McKinney, Yatziri Ortega, Zawadi Ozulamo (Junior grad), Ashely Rojas-Edge, Adelaide Rosene, Prisma Ruacho, Gabby Schreiber, Courtney Snoberger, Shantrice Solis, Lindsey Starrett, KaBao Thao, Lyn Tschanz, Milagros Urdaneta, Anna Uriostegui (Junior grad), Chris Wagner, Rebecca Wheeler

Odyssey Junior Partners and Guests: America's Black Holocaust Museum; Badger Precollege (Carrie Backman, Jeanne Hammes); Children's Theater of Madison; Go Team Therapy Dogs (Dawn, Joe, Sue); The Hat Ladies; Literally Arts (Dr. Jamie Henke, Dr. Hailey Love, Lucas Murray); Madison Circus Space (Alex, Hildy); Madison College (Jamaal Eubanks, Kelly McFee); Madison Public Library (Rachel Lavender, Nate Schmitz); Madison Reading Project; Media22 (Corey Whitmore); UW Elevation Dance Team; UW Kinesiology (Morgan Shields); UW School of Music (Alex Cope); UW Space Place

*Special thank you to Karen Dreyfuss for all her years spent with Odyssey Junior!



ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS

Director: Jen Fandel

Program Coordinator: Celine Fender

Academic Advisor: Christine Cina

Intern: James Casserly

Instructors/guest lecturers: Jen Fandel, Celine Fender, Taylor Kirby, Kevin Mullen, Dana Oswald, Ben Shannon

Volunteer Tutors and Storytelling Coaches: Gunce Derin, Anne Durst, Lydia Ellis, Jen Fandel, Ros Faulkner, Celine Fender, Eliot Finkelstein, Nestor Gomez, Elise Gresch, Jimmy Gutierrez, Danielle Hairston Green, Jade Iseri-Ramos, Susan Kaye, Taylor Kirby, Fernanda Loria Solano, Josh Mayers, Ali Muldrow, Patrick Nolan, Bianca Pak, Brendon Panke, Karen Redfield, Dom Ricks, Jen Rubin, Aurora Shimshak, Alex Stark-Haffner, Shana Toor, Seth Umbaugh, Kevin Wilmott,

Additional technical assistance by the UW-Madison Prison Education Initiative, namely Miranda Perry at Taycheedah Correction, Bryn Martyna at Oakhill Correctional, Gunce Derin, and Christine Pribbenow.



ODYSSEY SENIOR

Instructor: Emily Auerbach

Guests: Erin Celello, Kevin Mullen, Gene Phillips, Craig Werner, Sarah White



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

Brenda González

René Robinson '08 (Secretary)

Theodore Widder, III



Executive Director

Emily Auerbach

Advisors

Emily 'Em' Azad

Ben Garrison

Colleen Johnson

Jenny Pressman

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, 2026
- 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

Odyssey is a quilt passed on from each generation to the next. It once started as a patch and has grown to a beautiful tapestry with a rich history, collecting the stories of each class along the way.



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.

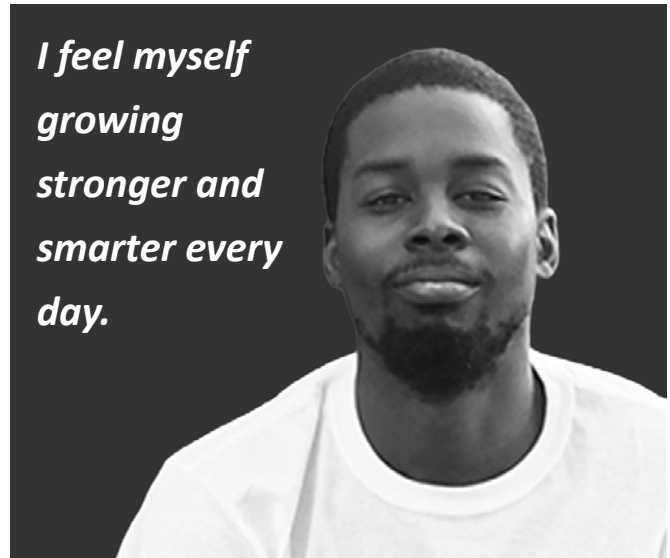
ODYSSEY ENDOWMENTS

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

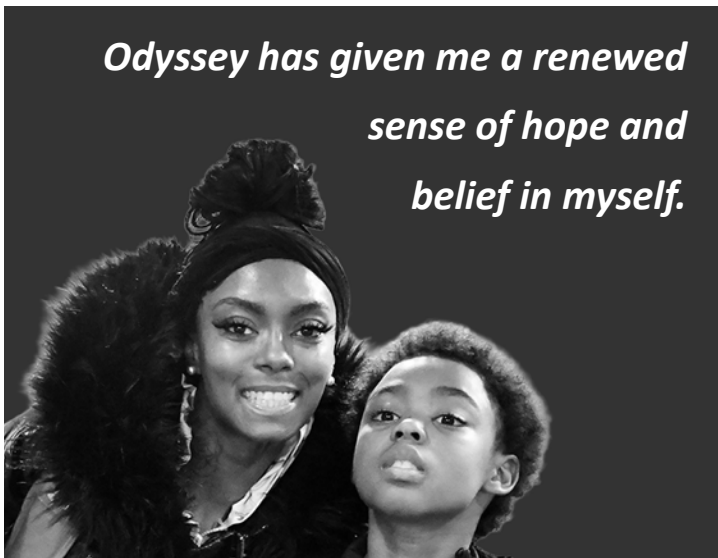
Find uwodysseyproject on:



*I feel myself
growing
stronger and
smarter every
day.*



*Odyssey has given me a renewed
sense of hope and
belief in myself.*



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 53278-8807

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 2026 winner is **Adrianne Farrow**, Odyssey '25. A single mother, Adrianne is completing a combination of Madison College and Onward Odyssey credits on her journey to earning a bachelor's degree. She writes, "I am proud to share that I am maintaining a strong academic standing. My long-term goals include graduating from UW-Madison with dual Bachelor's degrees in Information Technology and Business Management, as well as obtaining a certification in grant writing." Adrianne will use the scholarship to support both her own academic expenses and her daughter's participation in dance.



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 2026 representative is **Shataya Hall**. Shataya had her first child when she was just 14 and has worked hard as a single mom of three to go forward towards her goals. She writes, "Odyssey gave me the space and support to rediscover my voice, build confidence, and rekindle my love for learning." The first in her family to go past high school, Shataya now contemplates a college degree and career in social work.



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.

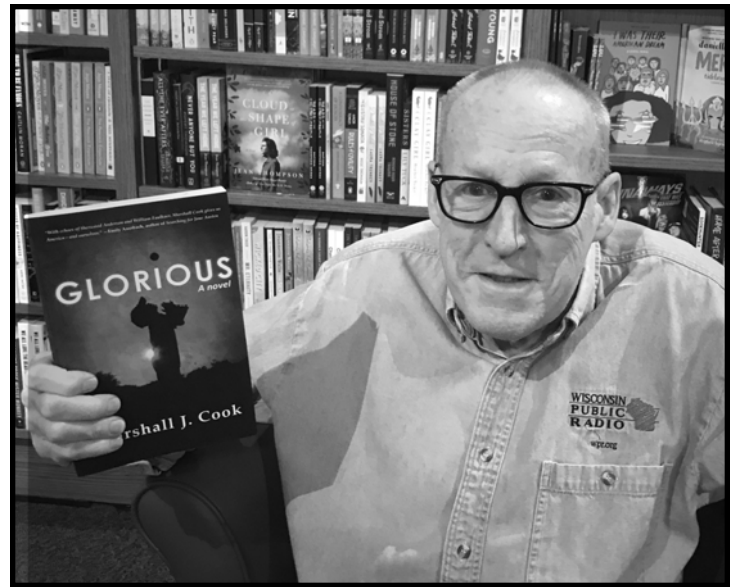


A devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Wanda Auerbach was an ardent supporter of the UW Odyssey Project. In her name, Bob Auerbach and the Auerbach-Meyer family established and added to an endowment to support prizes to all graduating students each year.

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 2026 recipient of the Huberty-Lenz Odyssey Junior Scholarship is **Neveah Conklin**, whose mom completed Odyssey in 2021.

Neveah will be attending Lawrence University

to earn a bachelor's degree, tentatively in political science and music. Looking back, Neveah remembers, "When I walked into Odyssey, I felt safe. I felt like I belonged. As I grew older, I began to understand the deeper impact of the program, its commitment to uplifting communities, honoring racial and cultural identities, and creating opportunities where there once were barriers. The message was clear: economic barriers do not define you. Your circumstances are not your limits. That message stayed with me long after my time in Odyssey Junior ended. It's why I chose to return, not as a participant, but as a volunteer."



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 2026 recipient of the Odyssey Health Care scholarship is **Tandalaya Taylor**, Odyssey '18. She has overcome tremendous adversity on her journey to becoming a hospital social worker.

She has been accepted into the

MSW program at UW-Stevens Point. Tandalaya writes, "I feel called to work in the healthcare field because I know from lived experience that health is about more than what shows up on a chart or in a diagnosis. Health is mental, emotional, social, and environmental. Whether someone feels seen, supported, and safe matters when they are fighting for their life in any capacity. Surviving stage four blood cancer myself changed not just my body but also my soul, my perspective, and my purpose. My purpose is to turn my pain into passion and power and my survival into service. Becoming a healthcare social worker would allow me to use my voice, empathy, and resilience to be the person I once needed to be. This is more than a career choice for me. This is who I am called to be."





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 2026 recipient of the Pat Wilmeth Onward Odyssey Scholarship is **Jayvonna Flemming**, Odyssey Class of 2016. A single mother of two who grew up in foster care, she is nearing completion of her bachelor's degree in social welfare from UW-Madison, with her eyes now on a master's degree in social work. Jayvonna writes, "I am a proud first-generation college student and a mother of two: Anila, who is 13, and Samuel, who is 11. Madison is where I've grown up and built my life, so graduating from UW-Madison feels especially meaningful to me. I have been in and out of foster care for most of my life and aged out at 18. My journey hasn't always been easy, but it has shaped who I am and continues to motivate me every day." The Pat Wilmeth Onward Odyssey Scholarship will support Jayvonne in her final semester at UW-Madison.



AAUW SCHOLARSHIPS

We thank the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Greater Madison Area for generously awarding scholarships to women continuing their education at community colleges in the fall. Below are brief biographies and photos of the two 2026 winners.

Angelica Alvarez Valenciano

A graduate of Odyssey's Class of 2025, Angelica attends Madison College in the Liberal Arts Transfer Program. She hopes to earn her bachelor's degree in education from UW and

to share her love of creative writing with her community. She is a single mom who encourages her son to develop his artistic gifts.

Sahira Rocillo Ramirez

A graduate of Odyssey's Class of 2015, Sahira attends Madison College with a goal of earning her ESL/bilingual education license. She calls herself "a Latina woman and the proud mom of two kiddos," one in middle school and one in second grade. Sahira plans to continue toward a bachelor's degree and the ability to give back to others.



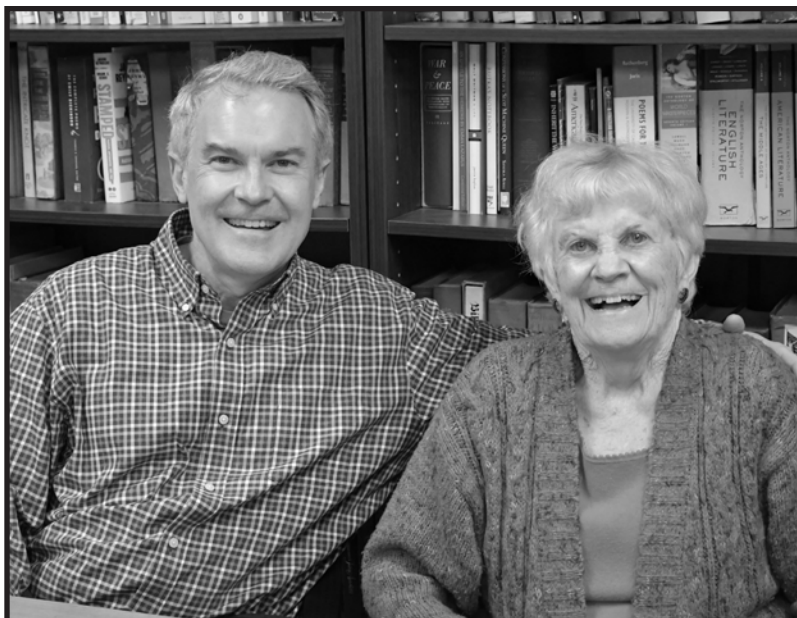
MORE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ODYSSEY STUDENTS

Students in our Class of 2026 are Evjue, Brittingham, or Anonymous Committee scholars through sponsorships by those organizations. We also gratefully acknowledge scholarships from The Business Forum of Madison, the Rotary Club, and the American Association of University Women (see above). To sign up for our monthly e-newsletters highlighting the successes of our alumni as they go on to win awards and earn degrees many were told would not be possible, visit our website.

To donate to any of these 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

Odyssey alum and success coach Brian Benford observes, “The amazing mother-son duo of Mary and Martin Rouse has had the most profound and positive impact on my education—and life. They helped me and countless others to be on paths to reach our full potential through education.” We are delighted to present Mary Rouse and Martin Rouse with the 2026 “Friend of the UW Odyssey Project Award,” the first time Odyssey has honored a mother and son in this way. Both have been champions of providing access for adults facing economic barriers to higher education and for finding ways to bring campus and community together.



Mary Rouse served as Dean of Students from 1987-2000 as part of her nearly half century of employment at UW. As director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service, she worked to create mutually beneficial community-university partnerships and to find ways to help nontraditional students feel more welcome on campus.

Short in stature, Mary Rouse made a giant mark on the UW and on Madison. Whether working to bring millions back into the neighborhood by offering free tax assistance to South Madison residents, launching blood drives to aid those with sickle cell anemia, or helping to establish awards for Returning Adult Students at UW, she saw her mission as targeting disparity and injustice and opening doors to opportunity.

Martin Rouse learned from his mother early on to respect people of all cultures and backgrounds and to work to aid those not always given a seat at the table. As Associate Dean & Director of Adult Career and Special Student Services in the Division of Continuing Studies before his retirement last month, Martin worked with special students, visiting international students, and community adults, including refugees and veterans. He championed the Badger Ready Program in University Special Student Services as another pathway along with Odyssey to support non-traditional students who thought a college degree was out of reach.

Martin played a key role in supporting students in both the UW Odyssey Project and Odyssey Beyond Bars. “Find a way to make it possible” seems to have been his mantra as he worked to clear obstacles for students battling a wide range of differences. “The Odyssey Project epitomizes the importance of the Wisconsin Idea,” he observes, “and it’s been an honor to work with students from this program as they continue their educational journeys.”

For both mother and son, action matters—action based on respect for others and a commitment to social justice. Congratulations, Mary and Martin Rouse!



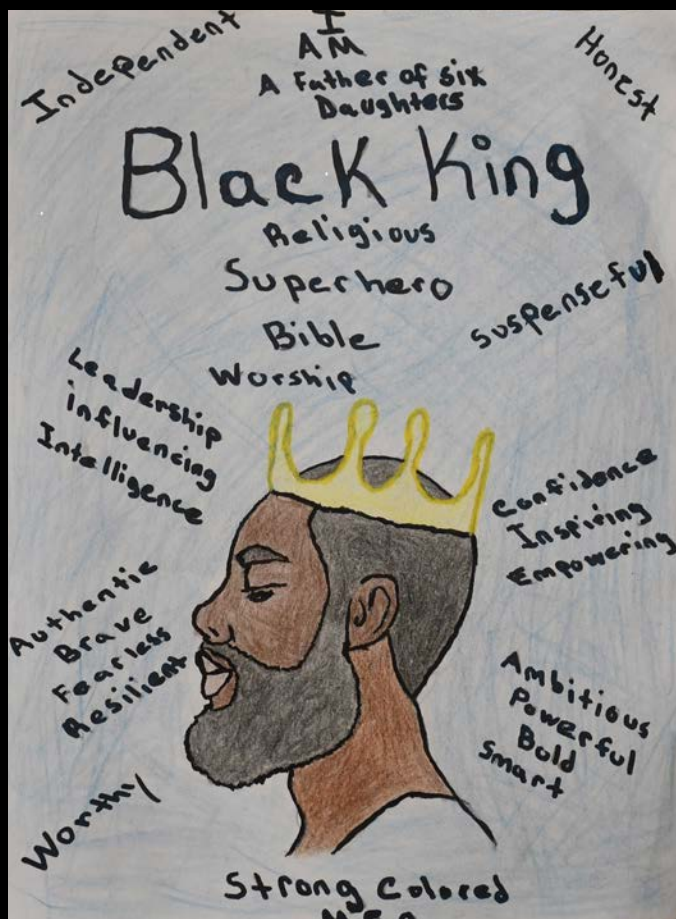
"A daylily, I survive every storm. The sun stays shining, peeking through the clouds, lighting my pathway."

—Shataya Hall



"I find beauty in what's scary to others. The black widow, so small yet dangerous, signifies my resilience. And my baby, my reason to live and feel so deeply. He is me and I am him."

—Stacy Castillo



"I am a Black king. I come from a struggle from low-income housing, project housing. I have six daughters that look up to me. I honor Black men's worth and value in a society that has historically oppressed them."

—Larry Grant



"I am a delicate rose made up from pain and hardship. I transform like a flower blooming against all odds, each thorn a testament to struggles faced, but eventually I bloom into vibrant wings of resilience and growth as a butterfly. I embody freedom, self-discovery, and the beauty that arises from overcoming my hardships and struggles."

—JuJu Stallworth

