

YEAR 19

MAY 4, 2022

ODYSSEY



ORACLE

CELEBRATING THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2022



www.odyssey.wisc.edu



SONG OF THE ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2022

We are the Odyssey Class of 2022!

We have worked as an office cleaner, lifeguard, bartender, cook, chef, cashier, barista, cosmetologist, construction worker, waitress, optical technician, in-home caregiver, farm hand, youth organizer, camp teacher, call center representative, special education teacher assistant, case manager, nursing assistant, playground aide, childcare provider, author, vendor, and Metro driver, holding jobs at GM, Culver's, McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts, Popeye's, Papa Murphy's, and Walgreens.

We hail from Madison, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Gary, Indiana; from Mexico City, Veracruz, and Pijijiapan in Mexico; and from Xela, Guatemala,

With ancestors coming from Spain, Bamako, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Germany, Hungary, and Mexico; from Maricopa, Arizona; Booneville, Indiana; Little Rock, Arkansas; Lexington, Kentucky; Durant, Mississippi; St. Louis, Missouri; Las Vegas, Nevada; Cincinnati, Ohio; Peoria, Illinois; Jackson, Mississippi; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

Speaking Spanish, English, German, Yoruba, Nahuatl, and Bambara,

Worshipping as Catholic, Presbyterian, Apostolic, Baptist, Muslim, Lutheran, voodoo, and hoodoo.

We call ourselves patient, stubborn, hopeful, sleepy, cute, loving, quiet, nurturing, observant, helpful, caring, perceptive, bold, loud, quiet, curious, inquisitive, strong, warrior-like, discombobulated, ruined, wise, clumsy, funny, tall, short, small, busy, shy, mindful, knowledgeable, lazy, stubborn, rowdy, determined, outspoken, and persistent.

We are the Odyssey Class of 2022!



UW ODYSSEY PROJECT CLASS OF 2022 GRADUATION CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2022, 6-7:30 PM

GREAT HALL, MEMORIAL UNION, MADISON, WISCONSIN

ORDER OF EVENTS

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC

Bob Auerbach

Winner of the 2021

Outstanding Individual

Philanthropist Award, AFP

WELCOMING REMARKS

Odyssey Co-Directors

Emily Auerbach and Kevin Mullen

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

UW-Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank

Winner of the 2022 Friend of the

UW Odyssey Project Award

ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2022 GRADUATION FILM

Produced by Emily Azad

and Emily Auerbach;

Edited by William Tishler Jr.,

Continuing Studies

ODYSSEY CLASS OF 2022 PROCESSIONAL

Greetings from Bucky Badger

Refreshments, Photographs (Hedi Rudd Odyssey '12), and More Music!



ODYSSEY GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2022



JONATHON ADEYANJU

Odyssey came into my life at one of the most tumultuous times of my life. I had just been released from a 15-year prison sentence, I lost a beloved family member, and I suffered an injury that could take a year

to heal. In the eye of that storm was the Odyssey Project, illuminating with beautiful rays of sunshine. It gave me clarity, allowing me to focus on the good and not the bad.

So from the depths of my heart, I want to say thank you to every staff member, no matter if you played a small role or big role, because what mattered is all of you who led by example, giving tirelessly day in and day out. Your work ethic set the tone and imbued the classroom's atmosphere with love. Thanks for that precious gift. Thank you to my fellow students for having the courage to be family. And thank you to my family for reminding me of my potential.

Last but not least, thank you to Wanda and Bob Auerbach. Your beautiful spirits are the seeds that

fertilized a majestic garden that continues to blossom and grow. We can never repay you, but we'll always be eternally grateful. This class was a beautiful tapestry indeed, and I can't help feeling that the Odyssey has only just begun.



AMANDA BELL

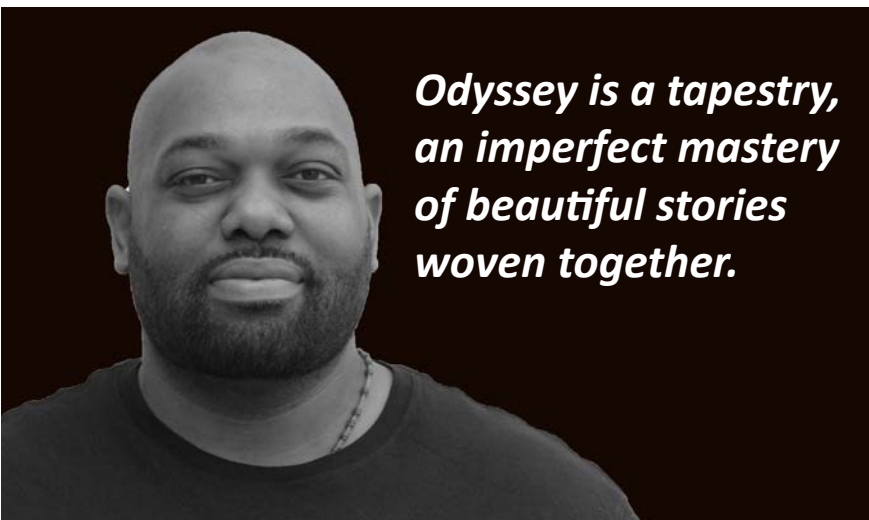
Lost in life, dealing with depression and homelessness, I wanted to give up on EVERYTHING! Once I received the email/phone call from Ms. Emily about being one of the thirty students accepted in the

Odyssey Program for the year of 2022, my heart dropped. I cried tears and praised God for the wonderful blessing/opportunity.

I want to thank my Uncle Rockameem (Odyssey '08) for discussing the program with me and giving me the thought of attending. I am the fourth Odyssey student within my family to graduate from the same program. If it were not for my uncle, I would not be graduating from such an encouraging program and on my way to the University of Wisconsin. I am truly blessed. My grandma is not

living to see me accomplish this goal in my life, but I know she is clapping for me in heaven. My mom has been encouraging me and has been with me every step of the way while I was in the Odyssey program, and for that I am very grateful.

All of the support I have received from Ms. Emily and everyone involved with Odyssey has helped me to keep striving for better and not giving up when things get tough. Ms. Emily communicated with me



***Odyssey is a tapestry,
an imperfect mastery
of beautiful stories
woven together.***

and made sure that I had all of my homework in on time. Even if it was late or not turned in at all, she still made a way for me to reach the finish line. For that I am forever grateful that I was given an opportunity to show my potential in school and overcome many obstacles while still learning. I was nervous and wanted to give up, but I knew that was not an option. I would have let so many people down including my mom, uncle, grandma, myself, and my kids. With the writing process in Odyssey, I started back writing my poems and using my voice to speak on things that affect me. I can finally see light at the end of a tunnel that was so dark for many years of my life. Thank you, Ms. Emily.



BRANDYN JEROME BESS

I am Brandyn, a proud father of a beautiful girl. A son who wants to make his parents proud. A brother who loves his siblings and misses the old days. A friend who does not get out much. A dreamer who

wants to find something to cherish. A loner who does not want to be alone. A man who is still learning to be a man. I am Brandyn.

My Odyssey brothers and sisters, the journey of this year's class is over but our journey together in life still lives on. I am glad to have gone through this incredible adventure with you guys, and I am sad to see it end. I would love to thank my mother, Hedi Rudd (Odyssey '12), for pushing me to apply to Odyssey and helping me along my class journey. I also want to thank both Emilys [Emily Auerbach and Emily 'Em' Azad], Kevin, and all the tutors. I did not get to tutoring much because of work, but I thank you anyway. I had a tough journey with Odyssey, as I was sick sometimes and going through work and life depression, yet I still completed the class and loved every moment of it. I hope you guys enjoyed my acting skills, such as being drunk Walter from A Raisin in the Sun, and my singing! I will miss all of you and just want you guys to know we are bonded as family. If anyone needs a person to talk to or help with anything, call me!

Odyssey is a convoy

As a class we take a journey to discover our voices, talents, and abilities while supporting, watching over, and complimenting each other.



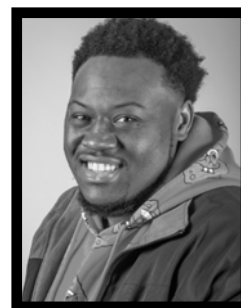
ERICKA BOOEY

What a school year this has been. Dealing with a pandemic where it gets better, then it gets worse, and then better again, thank goodness for my Odyssey experience. Odyssey has been a way I can express these difficult



times verbally and on paper. The encouragement from Odyssey staff, Odyssey classmates, my co-workers, family, and friends has been phenomenal to my self-esteem. I most enjoyed studying the arts.

If you want to feel empowered and to step out of your comfort zone by using your verbal and written communication skills, then the Odyssey Project is the program for you.



JERMAINE BOOEY

Odyssey—on the first day and the first few months it would make me nervous, and I didn't know anybody. I haven't been to school since I finished high school, but my mom talked me into applying. First, I wanted to

turn it down when I found out I was accepted, but my mom had my back and she wouldn't allow me. Man, I'm happy I stayed. I met lots of wonderful people, found some connections, got to experience school with my mom, and created new and great memories. But most importantly, I went back to school, something I told myself I wouldn't do and thought I couldn't do. But my mom, Kevin, and Emily believed and saw something in me I couldn't see.



CAPRI BOOKER

Graduation felt like nothing to me until Zaria reminded me that at my last graduation, I was pregnant. I walked across the stage 7 ½ months pregnant, and I remember always saying teen pregnancy stops nothing but friendships, families—not dreams. That same person, Zaria, was with me when I told my father I was pregnant. Mind you, we weren't talking and had actually just gotten into it recently. I asked her/ grabbed her because anyone who knew, this wasn't going to go smoothly. I want to give thanks to her for giving me the idea to dress up and walk the stage with my son again. I want to thank everyone in Odyssey who texted me back when needed, who helped me. I want to thank my babysitter, Trent, because without you, no one would have watched my son. You're not perfect, but you're more help than my own blood. I want to thank all the tutors who were available to us, and people who last minute picked me up and listened to my homework. Those people I would count on. Without you, Odyssey would have been harder to complete. Walking the stage with Jamarion shows teen pregnancy wasn't the end and means the most to me.



KAYANNA BRANCH

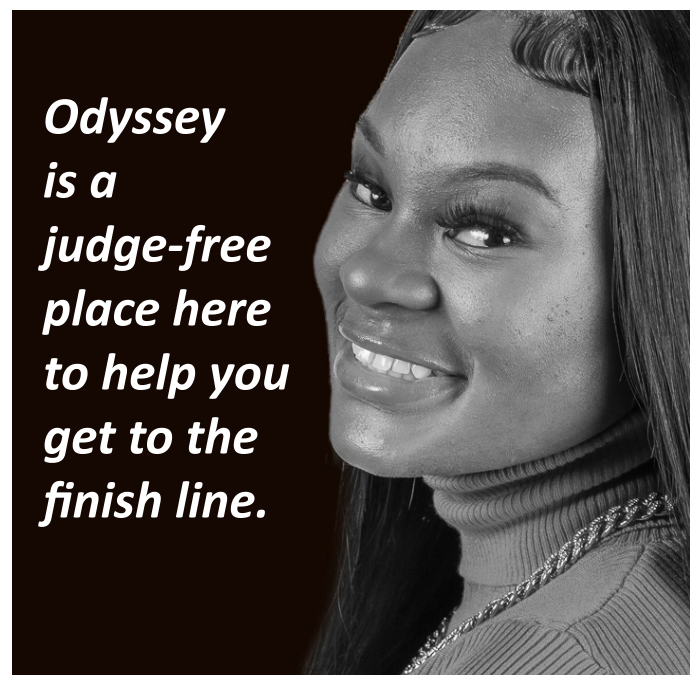
I was six months pregnant when I applied for Odyssey. I didn't think I would get accepted. When I did, I was beyond happy. I knew it was a stepping stone to get me back on track with my education. I remember in my interview, Emily asked me, "Do you think you will be able to attend classes with a new baby on the way?" I responded yes and did just that. Odyssey has taught me so much about myself and what I'm capable of doing. I had to work, take care of a newborn, and attend classes during a pandemic (COVID-19). It was extremely challenging, but with the help and patience of all the staff at Odyssey, I made it to the finish line.

I want to thank all the staff for being so supportive. I know every week grading my homework wasn't easy due to my blurred handwriting, but you never judged and always gave me great feedback on my responses. I know that this program is only the beginning of my future. I'm grateful to have been a part of the Odyssey Class of 2022.



KATRINA COLLINS

Thank you, Emily, for having the passion to put the Odyssey program together. I thank you for your gentle but strong push to give us reminders to get our work in. I thank you and the team for making some of the difficult learning fun and easier to learn. I thank for all the help with the food and snacks that we had at every class. I thank all the speakers/teachers that came and made learning fun. I thank all the tutors that helped us when we needed help. I thank all the sponsors that helped with the Odyssey Project. I am thankful for the amazing Oracles that were written, the awesome pictures that were taken, the ability to be on Zoom when we couldn't come in person, the awesome food, and the funds that were given to help. I am so thankful for being part of the Odyssey family!





YASMINE DOBBINS

When I applied to Odyssey, I had little to no hope at all. Dealing with depression, postpartum, and grieving a loss of a really close member of my family, my life was filled with turmoil. I applied because I had

a friend (more like sister) who had told me about the program and encouraged me to apply. Even though I was reluctant and didn't think that I would be chosen, I did so. I got a call/email from Emily saying that I was one of the thirty students selected to enroll into Odyssey in the fall, and I felt as if that was a glimmer of hope in my otherwise cloudy and chaotic life.

Odyssey became my beacon, a path that would move me from dim to dazzling. I just don't think that would have been possible without Odyssey. I am forever grateful for them and everyone on my journey that encouraged me to keep pushing and to not give up. I will take what I have learned on my journey in Odyssey and apply it to my everyday life situations. Thank you so much to my support system in Odyssey. I can never thank you enough.



ONTARIO FRAZIER

I'm proud of you, black man.
 You beat the odds, black man.
 Your skin is made of gold, black man.
 Black man, can you not be so hard on yourself?
 We know the world is cold, black man,
 And is unfit for you, black man, but we are kings.
 Black man, we know you carry a heavy load,
 But I'm proud of you.
 Black man, don't waste your life...
 I know you feel unappreciated and feel unloved
 But the world today would crumble without us.



ERENDIRA GIRON CRUZ

I knew about Odyssey because I worked in the Jumpstart class. I didn't know much about what happened inside the classroom, but being inside the classroom, it was different. It was more homey. Don't be shy and be

yourself! All the teachers are involved in all the ways to continue your studies. Everyone is welcoming, the teachers and classmates. Thank you to everyone who is involved in this wonderful journey.



CYNTHIA M. GONZALEZ

This year was by far the most challenging year for me. Going to school, working, and being a mother is no easy task. I am grateful for all of the support Odyssey has given along the school year. Thanks for all the

books baby Laila has received from Odyssey Junior and for all of the "hope to see you in class" texts/emails. Don't be scared, you will get all the support you need to graduate! Emily won't give up on you!



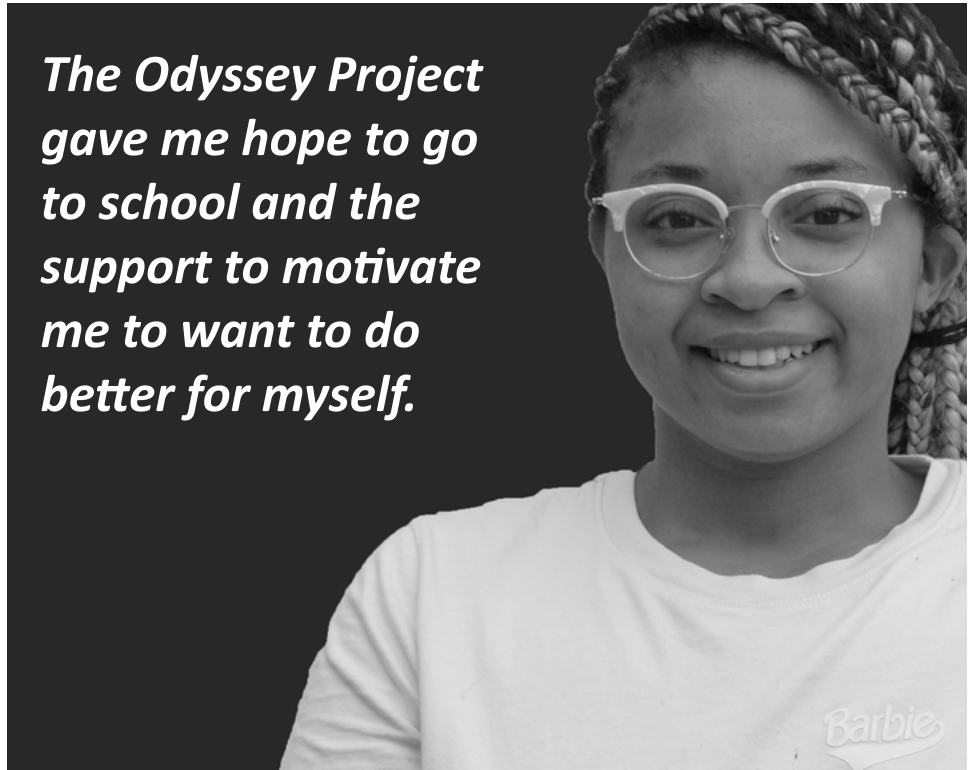
TALAISHA GOODWAN

This year in Odyssey has helped me figure out how to balance life when there's so much going on. When I applied for Odyssey, I hadn't attended school for almost two years now. I had my hands full with two children just

20 months apart. When my cousin first sent me the flyer that Odyssey was taking applications, I didn't exactly get excited about the opportunity. I questioned it, but eventually the pros outweighed the cons and I applied. Through the entire interview process, I questioned my ability to commit myself to school when I hadn't even thought about going back to school in so long, but from day one of the Odyssey Project, I saw abilities come out of me that me myself didn't even know I had.

Odyssey gave me the drive to pursue my dreams in school. They gave me a starting point that in my life was nowhere to be found. This was beyond a starting point—this was a great learning experience, and I was able to create a family that I could relate to, share experiences with, and even just laugh with. Acting was my favorite part, especially *A Raisin in the Sun*, even though half of the time I wouldn't volunteer. I liked seeing other people in the class get up and laugh about their mistakes and Professor Baron cheering us. Turned out acting is more than speaking in front of a group of people.

The Odyssey Project gave me hope to go to school and the support to motivate me to want to do better for myself.



I want to give a Huge Thank You to the entire Odyssey and Odyssey Junior staff. Even when I was three homework assignments behind, you encouraged me to come Wednesday nights whether it was in-person or through Zoom. Not once have I felt like you guys gave up on me; through texts, emails, or phone calls, you made it known you were there for me. Without a support system as strong as that, I wouldn't have fulfilled my Odyssey Journey and been as happy as I am now. I got the experience, and for that I thank you. I now have goals that I know I can achieve; I know the plan that is here before me, and it's all because of my experience In Odyssey. It's been a real excitement.

graduate. This includes my brother, who can easily become a statistic because of the false pretenses that social media pushes on our younger generation. This is why I fight for the key to knowledge that is deserved to me. I will not give up, Emily Auerbach: I will become an LPN. I will further my education. There were nights I wanted to give up on this program. You didn't give up on me. You had a beautiful, humble spirit when you said, "All graduates will graduate even if I have to drag you across the stage." I took that statement and fought my depression, procrastination, grief, and suicidal thoughts. I use that statement as a ball of fire. That one statement woke me up and helped motivate me. Thank you, Emily Auerbach!



CINDERRIA HARWELL

I want to thank Emily Auerbach for taking the time in the initial intake interview to give me a chance. When I say me, I mean my circle. This includes my three-year-old child, breaking the generational curse. This includes my sisters seeing a first generational



ZARIA HUNTER

I would like to say thank you to Sister René Robinson! I appreciate you for introducing me to the Odyssey Project. I also appreciate everyone that's a part of and in Odyssey. This was a great learning experience and program to be a part of. Thank you.



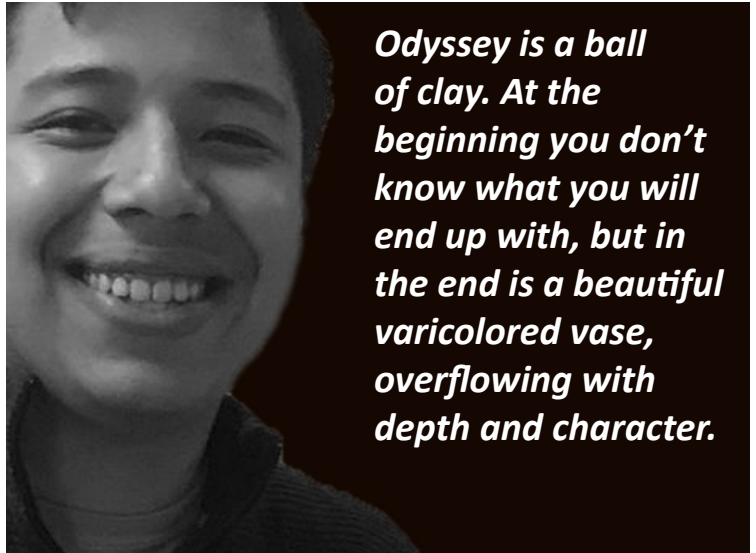
Yael Jimenez Gonzalez

Before joining Odyssey, I was in a precarious time in my life. I had a court case pending and didn't know what the future held in store for me. Little did I know, the tumultuous times

in my life were just starting. I endured constant sickness throughout the year (including COVID), a severed finger (and subsequent surgery), termination of employment (solely on the basis of my immigration status), a car accident, and more trips to the ER than I could care to count. Looking back, this has to have been the most chaotic and tempestuous time in my life thus far. Fortunately, the Odyssey program was always there for me every step of the way. Specifically, I would like to thank Emily Auerbach for inspiring me and for never giving up on me. She continued to push me to turn in work and to ask for help, and she continued to encourage me. Above all else, she did not let me give up on myself. Her incredible support and dedication to all of her students is unparalleled.

Additionally, I would like to thank the Odyssey program staff, for without your devotion and contributions, none of this would have been possible. I also want to thank the Odyssey program for being our biggest advocates. Through the trying times of a pandemic, we were fortunate enough to receive financial assistance through a grant, which would not have been possible without the constant work and effort from the people behind the scenes at the Odyssey program. They constantly advocated for us and underwent the behemoth task of applying for a grant on our behalf.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my parents, Marisol Gonzalez '16 and Victor Rojas '17, for encouraging me to apply to the program. I am the third person in my family to do so and am colossally proud to have followed in their footsteps. Their constant encouragement, guidance, and counsel are most highly revered, and I am exceedingly proud and honored to call them my parents.



Odyssey is a ball of clay. At the beginning you don't know what you will end up with, but in the end is a beautiful varicolored vase, overflowing with depth and character.

Moreover, a common theme here today is that this past year has been exigent on every single one of us. We have all had to endure in the face of impediments and adversity that could have hindered our progress and success, but it did not! We are standing here today triumphant over our obstacles and challenges, and I am roaringly proud to be a part of this outstanding class.



Crystal Johnson

This has been an amazing journey. Odyssey has been such a delight.



Helena Lee

I am really proud to call the Odyssey Project my family. With 30 of my brothers and sisters I embarked on a journey of self-discovery through reading and writing. I never believed myself to be a good writer as have many of my peers, but with the help of Ms. Emily, Brian and many other supportive people in Odyssey they never gave up on us. They pushed us to our limits even when we were at our lowest. They gave us so much confidence with each homework assignment, class lesson, or just a shoulder to cry on.

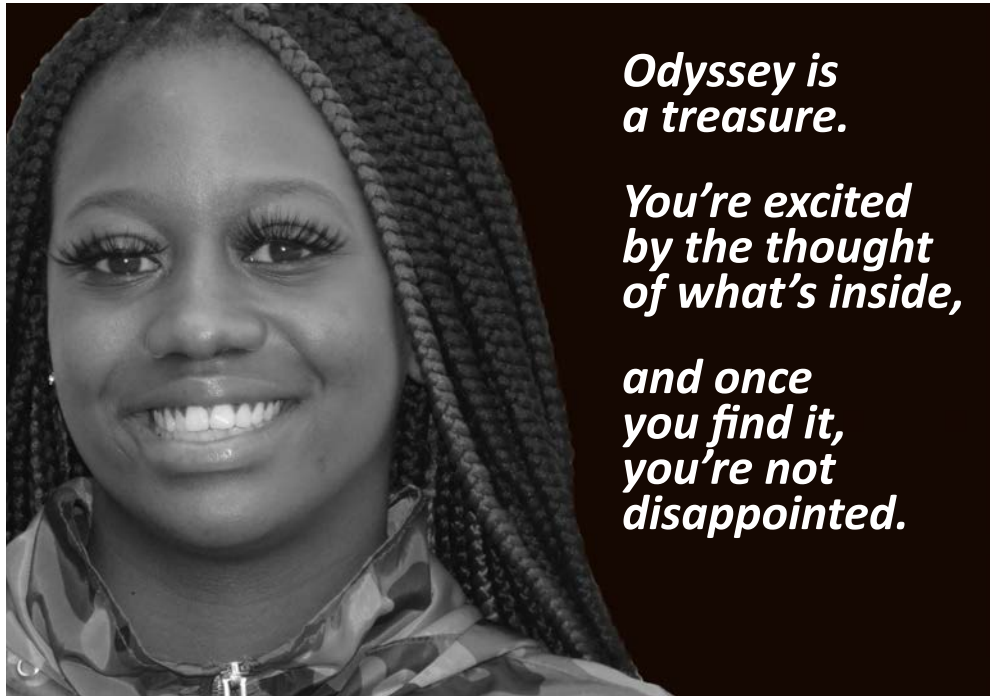
Throughout this course I learned what it means to be strong learner. I learned that my dreams can be hard but never impossible to accomplish. I've learned to not only shoot for the stars but have the whole universe in the palm of my hand with a smile and a lot of confidence. Even throughout the pandemic we all still had a strong connection. And I am very thankful for that. This school year has taught me so much emotionally, personally, and academically. I feel like I've not only had the resources to continue with pursuing my college education to become a Physician Assistant, but I also have gained the self-confidence, resilience, and willingness to never give up on my dreams. I am willing to make my grandma and the rest of my family proud, but most importantly I have made a promise to make myself proud through whatever storm comes my way.



MICHELLE LEE MACK

The door opening to Odyssey was honestly a manifestation and prayer that came true. Working at UW Hospital allowed me to meet amazing people, one of whom was Umaina

Mohammed Saed, the person who introduced me to Odyssey [Odyssey Class of 2016, UW bachelor's 2019, now in graduate school]. I had no idea what I was signing up for, but I knew from reading through the stories online that I was embarking on something great. Odyssey has allowed me to be awakened to my history and to show much more in this life. It has shown me that community is so important and that the connections between us are so deep. I feel blessed for the opportunity and for my



***Odyssey is
a treasure.***

***You're excited
by the thought
of what's inside,***

***and once
you find it,
you're not
disappointed.***

continued journey ahead. Shout outs to all the staff here at Odyssey and those working towards being a better version of yourself.



MARIAM MAIGA

When I decided to join Odyssey, there were two things at the time I was sure of. One was that getting into this great program would be such a wonderful experience, and the second was that I was ready for

a change. I was able to do both with the help of Emily and the whole Odyssey Project. After I had my daughter, it was important for me to take steps to better both our futures.



MASHELL MCCARTER

I would like to say thank you to all of Odyssey's staff. They're truly amazing. You guys gave me the courage to take a look at myself and start to rebuild a better life for me and my family. Emily, may God

continue to bless you for starting this program.



REGINALD MOORE

I entered Odyssey with two emotions, anxious and still afraid. I was anxious because everyone kept telling me that Odyssey is the perfect platform to hone my writing skills, and afraid because it had been

forever since I had been in a class. By the time it was time for graduation, and with the persistence of Emily and the Odyssey teachers, I became even more anxious, but no longer afraid. Courage comes with Odyssey.



LARONDA MORRIS

I first heard about Odyssey about two or three years ago. When I first signed up, I emailed Emily and she told me the list had just closed. So I waited. I emailed her again when it was time for the new class to start.

She told me to fill out a questionnaire. I later got an email saying I was accepted. I was so happy I cried a little bit because I wanted to be in Odyssey for a while now, and finally I was accepted.

The first day I was nervous; I didn't know what to expect or what the other students were going to be like, or anything. I'm glad I joined Odyssey because here I am, showing my two sons anything is possible, or it's never too late.



WILL NUNN III

I was but a dreamer, looking to make my dreams a reality, when I came across the Odyssey Program. I began to do research and quickly realized this was a program I needed in order to

begin to turn my dreams into a reality.

Life is a circus and that didn't change at all while in Odyssey. In fact, life got even more hectic, but with the support of the staff and my family I learned to juggle even better. This has been a great

experience that words can't even describe.

The best response to an opportunity is action. I appreciate the opportunities Odyssey has provided. I will work every day to be better and thrive for my family and community.



CYLINTHIA D. OLLE

When you stop dreaming and start stepping towards your goal, that's when you will see a new plan unfold. This was my second time applying for Odyssey. My life always seemed to have an "on time" feeling.

People say procrastination is bad. Then, turn that around to say good things come to those who wait.



KIMARI ROGERS

The Odyssey Program has given me tremendous hope--a hope for success, longevity, and accomplishment. Because of the staff and alumni, they made me believe that my limits are infinite. This program has

opened many doors for me to walk right through. I'm confident that I am more than capable of completing my degree in the electrical field. Whether I choose to go down the path of electrical engineer or industrial engineer, I know that I can do anything I put my mind to. I'd like to give a special thanks to my mother. Without her motivation and idea of this program, I wouldn't be walking through this open door.



JESSICA SALDANA

I learned about Odyssey while looking on the UW-Madison website and dreaming about being a student at UW-Madison. Today I'm glad to say that Odyssey turned my dream into reality. Odyssey gave me the

hope, the foundation, and the strength to pursue my career goal through higher education.



NAQUILA TAYLOR

Words can't express how truly grateful I am for Odyssey. Odyssey has given me a feeling of support that I didn't know I needed. Our instructors were great examples of showing selflessness, patience, and

supportiveness. I came into Odyssey very nervous and just praying for the strength to make it to the end. Being a mother of two little boys and taking classes at Madison College to be a nurse, I knew my workload would be heavy, but I believed in myself. I am also very motivated by my children to be the best version of myself for them, someone they could be proud of, and of course I wanted to be someone that I can be proud of.

It was a very humbling year. During the year, myself, our classmates, and our instructors experienced battling COVID, the loss of loved ones, injuries, housing issues, and more, but we all got through it together even if it was just sending encouraging words and giving support. I think we all can say even through all our struggles it was nice to know we were not alone and have someone we could vent to. I want to say to all my classmates, congratulations. Despite your circumstances you made it and you should be very proud of yourselves and know that you are even stronger today. I would also like to say thank you to all our

instructors for their support, their patience, their grace, and their willingness to welcome joy and laughter into the classroom. Also, thank you, Emily, for allowing us the opportunity to meet your father, Bob Auerbach; I appreciate his strength and willingness to join us and bless us with his music. I thank all the other acting coaches and visitors that came to drop knowledge on us.

I would like to give a special shout out to a past Odyssey alum, the late Ms. Juanita Wilson '07, whose words in all the Oracles we read from the past graduates played a part in inspiring me to the end; thank you, Granny. This Odyssey journey has been very fulfilling, and I am a little saddened for it to be over. Odyssey was truly a blessing, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity. To exit, I just want to say, congratulations to our Class of 2022: we did it! I'm sending everyone well wishes and good luck on our futures and most importantly wishing everyone good health and great wealth, with love.



MECHELE A. WILLIAMS

Reading was nothing I was ever good at. But my memory would flow with the words someone would read to me. I got so good at that, I could tell you if you skipped anything in the reading. I avoided reading

as much as I could, getting books on tape, allowing others to read to me, and just avoiding it altogether.

Even when I went to MATC, I took English as an accelerated class, getting English 1 and 2 done in 16 weeks. So when I got to Odyssey and they gave me a million books, it felt like I wanted to never come back. I'm so glad that I did! This program has given me true friends, the opportunity to reconnect with family, and the chance to learn to read and write for enjoyment. All of these are now great pleasures in my life, and I know they will be around forever.

*Odyssey is a song;
it gives us big visions
and the ending
accomplishments
are a melody
in our ears
that will last forever.*



ALONG FOR PART OF THE JOURNEY



BENJI RAMIREZ GOMEZ

Fall only

While the year has been difficult, Odyssey has been great. In Odyssey, I've found a community, a routine, a journey. I've been able to meet people from all over Madison, connect with rich texts, and make the first step in returning to school. I've been present in class [Fall semester], contributing my views and thoughts to discussions, as well as being a resource for my peers.

Winter is a difficult time for me in an already challenging context (read: pandemic), but I wish to remain a part of this community. I hope to have something on the calendar that's both riveting and stimulating. Odyssey is a second chance.



COMING SOON

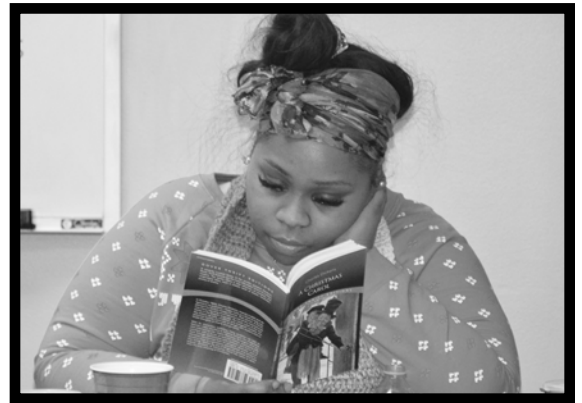
In this graduation program for our May 4th ceremony, we acknowledge only a few of our many team members, volunteers, sponsors, and partners. An extended issue of this Graduation Oracle including almost a thousand individuals and organizations that have contributed to Odyssey in 2021-2022 will be mailed out in June.

Not on our mailing list? To be added, contact Program Manager Emily "Em" Azad at emily.azad@wisc.edu or 608-590-5862.

Whether you brought us granola bars or children's books, donated \$5 or \$500,000, we thank you on behalf of all our Odyssey families breaking cycles of generational poverty and rewriting the stories of their lives.

ODYSSEY'S FOUR 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 500 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 the journey.

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



ODYSSEY 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 empathy, 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."

MEET THE ODYSSEY TEAM FOR 2021-2022

ODYSSEY PROJECT AND ONWARD ODYSSEY

Co-Directors: Professors Emily Auerbach and Kevin Mullen

Program Manager: Emily 'Em' Azad

Odyssey Coordinator: Christina DeMars

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

Director of Development & Community Partnerships:
Jenny Pressman

Budget Manager: Roberta 'Bobbie' Wang



Classroom Assistant & Odyssey Ambassador: Char Braxton '06

Oracle and Yearbook Designer: Beth Auerbach

Class of 2022 Photographer: Hedi Rudd '12

Odyssey Teaching Faculty: Nidia Banuelos, Christy Clark-Pujara, Jean Feraca, Baron Kelly, Gene Phillips, Craig Werner

Academic Advising: Ace Hilliard

Financial Advising: J.P. Pfund

Odyssey Guests: Keena Atkinson '10, Bob Auerbach, René Robinson '08, Gavin Lawrence (APT)

Onward Odyssey Guests: Aubrey Deeker (Acting Techniques); Kacie Lucchini, Darshana Sreedhar Mini, and Lawrence Winn (Sociology: Race and Ethnicities); Emily Auerbach, Eliot Finkelstein, Leah Freemon, and Craig Werner (English Composition)

Odyssey Interns and Student Hourly Helpers: Steve Tollios (Boltz Center fellow), Gwendolyn Coale, Caitlin McGahan, and Jan Sydney (Social Work Interns); Summer Kleppek (general assistance)

Odyssey Facilities: Brenda González (Director of Community-University Engagement) and Merry Farrier-Babanovski (Assistant Director), UW-South Madison Partnership

Class Meals: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, PEO Chapter BC/Sandy Kaufmann

Volunteer Tutors: Gabrielle Kelenyi (coordinator), Holly Anderson, Sherri Bester '08, Francesca Bua, Kyrie Caldwell, Lisa Godfrey, Stanley Jackson, Jin Jang, Lisa Marie Johnson, Joe Linstroth, John Morgan, JP Pfund, Cynthia 'Cindy' Poe, Karen Redfield, Beth Schaffer, Berit Thorson, Tom Tucci

English 100 Storytellers: Takeyla Benton '10, Marisol Gonzalez '16, Brendon Panke, Jen Rubin





ODYSSEY JUNIOR

Director, Odyssey Junior: Karen Dreyfuss

Odyssey Junior Teaching Staff: Brian Benford '07, Leigh Button, Christina DeMars, Marisol Gonzalez '16, Qiana Holmes, Mackenzie McDermit, Albert Watson '08

Odyssey Junior volunteers, tutors, and guests: Desia Bacon, Ellie Breitfeld, Emily Brookhyser, Pat Dillon, Alexis Dean, Shadayra Flores, Kingsley Gobourne, Gabrielle Javier-Cerulli, Emily Kassens, Melina Knabe, Parker Mays, Nichelle Nichols, Austin Triggs, and Haley Weaver, Jayda Woods (Odyssey Junior '21, now at UW)



ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS

Director: Peter Moreno

Program Manager: Lauren Surovi

Tutoring Coordinator: Jennifer Fandel

Instructors: Kevin Mullen, Craig Werner with Anthony Black, Jean Feraca with Jerry Hancock, Dana Oswald (Racine Correctional), Jennifer Fandel (Columbia Correctional), Charles Rybek (Green Bay Correctional), Ivan Babanovski (Oakhill Correctional)



Volunteer Tutors and Storytelling Coaches: Ivan Babanovski, Jennifer Fandel, Anya Gersoff, Jen Rubin, Jasmine Banks '12, Albert Watson '08, Ali Muldrow, Brendon Panke, Kevin Willmott

Guest faculty—Emily Auerbach, Craig Werner, Eliot Finkelstein (UW librarian), Alex Stark (UW librarian)

Academic and Financial Aid Advisors: JP Pfund, Martin Rouse, Ace Hilliard, Sarah Stilp, Autumn Sanchez



DIVISION OF CONTINUING STUDIES

Jeffrey Russell (Dean & Vice Provost of Lifelong Learning)

Hope Simon (Associate Dean of Administration and Finance)

Donna Gastevich (Associate Dean of Development & Business Engagement, Growth Strategies, Strategy & External Relations)

Colleen Johnson (Director of Development & Business Engagement)

Sage Goellner (Chair, Liberal Arts & Applied Studies)

Integrated Marketing Communications Team

FRIENDS OF THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT, INC.

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Don Miner (Treasurer)

Jean Feraca

Brenda González

René Robinson '08 (Secretary)

Theodore Widder, III



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Emily Auerbach

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LETTERS TO THE CLASS OF 2023

Dear Odyssey Class of 2023 . . .



You feel that nervous energy? Excitement fused with uncertainty? Embrace it! As time goes by, you'll miss those moments. Just do me one favor. Whenever you're unsure of yourself, just remember that there's beauty in the process. You have what it takes, and you're here for a reason. The torch has been handed to you guys, and we do so proudly. I look forward to seeing you all graduate. Knock 'em dead. **(Jonathon Adeyanju)**



Congratulations to all 30 new students who have decided to go to college and have a life-changing opportunity with the Odyssey Project. You are beginning a new chapter in your life and have so many great opportunities waiting

for you.

Class of 2022 wasn't easy for me personally, but I am proud to say that I made it. Coming into the program, I was nervous and really didn't know what I was doing at the time of me becoming an Odyssey student. I had mixed emotions when I first started class, but then everything changed. I got to know my wonderful teachers and other individuals within the two semesters of class, along with my classmates. The Odyssey Project was the best thing that came into my life while I was dealing with depression and homelessness. Odyssey became my family and, most of all, my support system. Our social worker, Mr. Brian, was a great person to get to know and communicate with. He helped me with resources I knew nothing about. Christina and Em worked hard with keeping students on track and

making sure everyone was on the same page and had all the tools we needed for class. Mr. Kevin got me back writing poetry and eager to learn new writing techniques. Char also made sure we all got food in class. Ms. Emily gave me an opportunity to rewrite the story of my life, and I thank God for that every day. Odyssey has changed my life, made me see light, and helped me feel that things can really change in your life if you are willing to accept that change.

You come into Odyssey empty-handed and graduate with a whole new state of mind. Class of 2023, have fun, learn new things, try new things, and, most of all, go all the way and push as hard as you can to complete all your work. Everyone works as a team, so never be afraid to open up and ask for help.

Good luck, and I can't wait to see everyone walk across the stage for graduation. Class of 2023, YOU GOT THIS! **(Amanda Bell)**





Hey, welcome, new Odyssey members! Congratulations on being picked to join this family. Honestly, you are going to have to work hard in Odyssey, but it will be so worth it. There are plenty of people here who have your back and that will help you along the way. I was very nervous I wouldn't be able to complete Odyssey when I first started, but with the help of Emily and the Odyssey family we all made it through. I want you guys to think about who you are as a person now when you start this class and think about who you want to be at the end of the Odyssey journey. Take notes each class and show up to class ready to participate and you will do great! **(Brandyn Bess)**



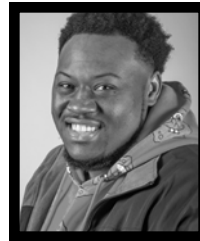
I'll tell you ahead of time that this experience that you are about to embark on will leave you feeling honored and privileged to have been an Odyssey Project participant. Understand that this experience will be not only good but great.

Allow Odyssey to take you out of your comfort zone. We don't know if we like something until we've tried it. My advice to you is to just let it happen for you. Don't let anything get in the way of exploring yourself and learning more about yourself. Whether you are old or young, take this trip of self-improvement. When you know better, you do better.

Allow Emily and other Odyssey staff to help you overcome barriers you face that can possibly prevent you from completing the Odyssey Project. That has to be the most unique quality of Odyssey Project to me. You won't fail because they won't let you fail.

Know that you are as good as anybody else. Even during the bad times of your life, you are worthy of knowledge for self-improving, no matter what your situation may be. Know that any

obstacles you face you can overcome. Know that if you are still here that you are still here for a reason. Your mission is not accomplished. There is more work for you to do. You are needed. You are worthy of empowerment. **(Ericka Booney)**



My mom was telling me she was applying for a program called Odyssey, and she was saying I should apply, too. Now, school isn't my strong suit, but I thought this was a great opportunity to experience with my mom while also working part time. Yes, it was a struggle, and soon after joining Odyssey and learning I was accepted, I got a full-time job doing in-home care. Going to school and working trying to make ends meet wasn't easy, but something about being in the classroom of Odyssey was very warm and comfortable. It just made you believe in yourself and gave you confidence.

By month two or three it seemed like things were going really well--working full-time, going to school, doing well, and enjoying both. But, of course, life happens, and I just got hit with the worst tooth pain ever. Man, this pain I don't know how to describe, but it took me out of work for two weeks. I even missed a couple classes of Odyssey. I missed a lot of nights of sleep. You would hope you could cry yourself to sleep, but the tooth pain kept



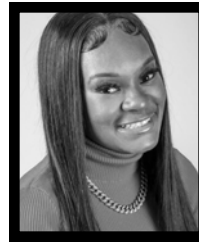
me up. I had to wait a month and a half because I was out of insurance benefits and that really sucks. . . . If I ever become rich, I promise I will open up on my expense a free dental clinic 24/7 for veterans and for everyone. I was blessed with Odyssey and God. I started getting money from Odyssey that really helped with my debt and paying off my tooth pulling. Thanks to Odyssey for helping me open my eyes, giving me confidence, and pushing me towards what I should do in life. I'm still thinking about it but I do know I want to help people and to open a 24/7 free dental clinic, an animal shelter, and a homeless shelter. I would love to do that before I leave this earth. Thanks to Odyssey for helping me choose this direction.

In a classroom with 29 other people something like me, we told stories. In the judge-free classroom, I listened to the stories and learned so much. Odyssey is changing lives. I honestly don't know where I would be without Odyssey. It's like a second family. I will definitely miss this class of 2022 but will stay in touch. Good luck to the Class of 2023! **(Jermaine Booe)**



The first thing I want to say is welcome to the beginning of a fresh journey. Everyone you believe wants the best for you should go through this journey with you. No one who wants you to succeed will watch you drown.

For the beginning to honestly be the beginning, you have to drop dead weight. Stop creating long heartbreaks, struggles, and depression. Odyssey may be hard. At your worst, you have to keep going. I gained 30 pounds from stress because my son had two seizures. Doctors weren't listening—but that didn't stop Emily from calling. She can be a headache, but she means well. Rest on her when you need help. Make it well-known what tutors you need! For me, it was Kevin. Never fall apart when you can change the outcome. Believe in yourself even if death comes in your family. Remember they wanted you to make it. You are your biggest supporter. Become who you need to be, want to be, and dream to be with Odyssey. Good work and congratulations on the start! You can contact me. **(Capri Booker)**



If you are reading this, you have been accepted into one of the best programs in Madison. This program opened my eyes and gave me the motivation and support I needed. I hope to be joining a college right after our graduation. Take advantage of this opportunity. Use the help and resources they provide for you. My best advice is to take time out of your schedule and set aside time to complete your homework and ask the staff questions. They are all here to help you and push you to achieve your goals. This program is only the beginning. After this program, you will be able to continue your education if that is something you want to do. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and come to class even when you're having a hard time completing your homework. This program is a judge-free place, and every staff member a part of Odyssey will be here for you with open arms. They are here to help you get to the finish line. **(Kayanna Branch)**



You are the Odyssey Class of 2023! You are amazing! You are amazing because Mrs. Emily and her staff choose amazing people. Just don't stop, don't quit! You will learn so much quality information. You will find yourself saying, "I want to learn more about that." The Odyssey class is fun, and you will learn amazing things. **(Katrina Collins)**



First, I want to start off by congratulating you. One congratulations is for actually taking the leap and interviewing for Odyssey, and a second congratulations for actually being chosen. Odyssey is like no other,

and you've made the best decision to be a part of it. Prior to Odyssey, my experience with school wasn't always the best. Although I was super afraid to give it another try, I'm glad I did. The support throughout Odyssey is unmatched. I doubted it myself and thought that I would not be able to complete Odyssey because I was a mother, amongst other obstacles in my life, but I swear you will succeed here.

When you first start, I'm sure you'll be looking around the room like I did, trying to find a familiar face or someone who you could relate to. Soon everyone you are in the room with now will seem like family. These people are just like you, afraid of the journey that's to come, and the good thing is that you have others right alongside you to walk the journey with you. You are going to do fine, so get all of those stereotypes out of your head or past experiences where teachers left you hanging and it

seemed like you were drowning to catch up. In Odyssey you have so much support, from tutoring and just being able to reach out to Emily any time you are stuck and have questions. So get settled and BREATHE! You will be amazing on your path to further your education.

Another piece of advice to leave you with is to never get discouraged or to feel like your writing is not good enough because nobody in this room is here to judge you or what you have been through. Another thing is to find and use your voice. Please be sure to reach out and communicate when you are struggling or in need. Remember, closed mouths don't get fed. You are going to do great things this year. Again, congratulations and good luck!

(Yasmine Dobbins)



Welcome to the start of your new future! That sounds corny, right? You have probably heard that before when you were going into school or work sometime in your life. Well, here this is no joke: I have not experienced before the lessons

and doors that will open for you upon taking this journey. You are UW students, and don't let anyone

tell you differently. For most of us, attending a big four-year college would only happen by playing sports, being super smart, or us having that perfect family with parents who can put us through school. It seems like a TV sitcom, but in our worlds with the diverse backgrounds we come from, we deal with hardship, whatever that may be. So, if you are serious about breaking barriers and family curses, you are in the right place.

Odyssey won't come easy; it's going to test you, in the long winter months, with depression, fatigue etc. Every



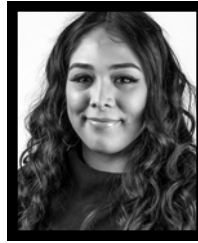
emotion will hit you. Don't fold because the reward is so much better. Strangers become family and if you are honest and a decent human being, the people in the class will become people you need to embrace over the two semesters. Homework will make you think this isn't just a small experience; the staff is going to work and bring the best version of you out. Ms. Emily and the staff that you will meet are one-of-a-kind, so if you are somebody who is wasting time and not going to take this seriously, do me a favor and let them know ASAP, because that spot you are wasting could be used for somebody who is in need and is on a mission.

The individuals involved are the few people in the world who are breaking barriers and trying to really shape the new future where minorities have a chance. They will break their backs to help you succeed. Most importantly, they will help you with whatever you need and will stay on top of it and find answers/resources. Please take this seriously. Nothing but best luck to you all, and I hope to meet you all, future UW alumni. In the words of somebody this world lost too early, "The Marathon Continues" (Ermias Nipsey Hussle Asghedom). Your Victory Lap is closer than you know, Blessings and Love to you. **(Ontario Frazier)**



Hello, classmates from another class year. You will be fine in this classroom setting. The teachers, tutors, and everyone involved in

Odyssey are understanding. In the beginning, it will feel like a classroom setting, but as the class goes on, it becomes close. It's a great setting for anyone who is looking to move forward with their studies. Don't be afraid to ask for help and open up, and share your experience and your struggles. Show how much of a wonderful human being you are. **(Errendira Giron Cruz)**



This year, thought me, that not only do I have the ability to be a working mother but also a student. Being in school before having a child, my focus and drive were just not there, almost like I needed something more. After having a child, you really have a different type of ambition, like you can conquer the world, so if balancing school, work, and life makes you feel intimidated, don't be. Wednesday nights are my favorite. Walking into class, you'll forget about everything happening outside of class. It truly is a very accepting and encouraging atmosphere. But if you are a shy person, I hate to break it to you but there is no such thing as being shy: you will go past your comfort zone and in the end will probably be the most outspoken of the group. Like they say in Mexico, "toma la vida por los cuernos": take life by the horns.

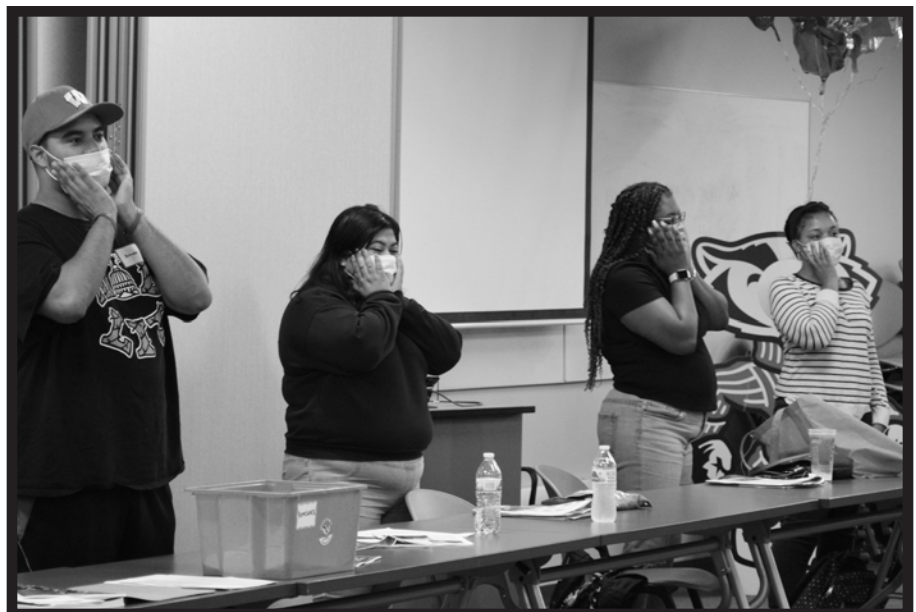
(Cynthia Gonzalez)



Welcome to Odyssey Class of 2023. Some of you may still be trying to figure out if this class is the one for you or if you have the ability to complete this class.

Well, I'm excited to tell you, let all the worry go. This is a start to

a journey that will not only bring your abilities



and skills out, but it will also make them better. You will grow so many ambitions to keep going not only through Odyssey but years after.

When I first got my acceptance letter from Odyssey, I questioned my decision of applying to the program. I was a mother of two toddlers, and I hadn't attended more than one semester of school since graduating high school, so my faith in completing the program was little to none. From the very beginning of Odyssey, those feelings were filled with confidence and faith. The program helped me change my "I can't do it" to "I Can."

It gets hard, but sometimes it gets exciting. There are so many experiences that are worth experiencing in the Odyssey program. This will be the journey you will hope that everyone around you one day will get to experience. So get your mind ready because from now until graduation it will be blown away with knowledge, faith, and happiness. You can do it! You're reading this today, and this is your "You can do it" message that you needed to hear. **(Talaisha Goodwan)**



I just want you to know class is going to be hard. You are going to want to give up. You are going to want to pull your hair out. You are

going to go through life trials. For example, I faced homelessness, auto-repossession, combative disputes that almost landed me in jail, and I tried to commit suicide. These are personal, but as you will soon find out, we are family. Let me be the first to say, "I love you" and "You are enough."

Your life will get hectic. I've gotten fired, quit, and struggled to get homework done. Lately i work 10 am-6 pm. I'm up all night. When I get to work, I'm drained. After work I have a three-year-old. She is a

handful. I know I only have one, but the amount of attention she needs is the equivalent of three children. Between work, homework, and my daughter, I'm pooped. My safe place is Dunkin. All of my friends are there and I can do my homework there. It's my safe place.

You have to decide what's more important, class or no class. I put my sleep aside to go to class. Class will get me out of my situation. Poverty, homelessness, and being in a financial struggle will always be here. Class is my ticket out of this situation. Class is my way out of this reality.

(Cinderria Harwell)



This is going to be one of the best experiences of your life! You're going to meet so many new people, learn new things, and improve yourself overall as a person and a student. Everyone in Odyssey is going to support you in

becoming your best self during this journey of your life! I hope you all have a great semester and an amazing odyssey throughout the year!

(Zaria Hunter)





Now (assuming you are in person), take a good look around the class. Odyssey is filled with rich histories and backgrounds, as well as diverse peoples in both ethnicities and perspectives. You are in for a treat! Additionally, I'm

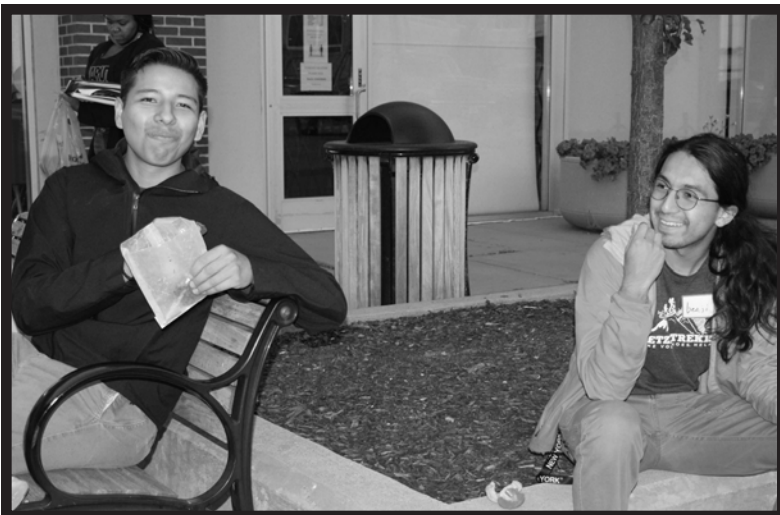
happy to inform you that this is where the competition with your peers ends. Moving forward, you don't have to worry about competing with anyone but yourself. This program is geared for you to grow academically and to help you find your voice. That being said, it's imperative to remember this feeling of joy as you received the email that you were accepted into the program. There will be many times during the course of the program in which you will have hardships and obstacles in your way that will prevent you from doing classwork. **DO NOT GIVE UP.** Remember the joy you felt today, and remember what it took to get here. You have the privilege of being part of this program, so take full advantage of that. Again, from the hundreds of applicants, only 30 of you were selected, so be proud and be committed.

Furthermore, it's critical to remember that in the face of adversity, you are not alone. Although you may feel that you are able to prevail without help, don't hesitate to reach out to the program. Everyone that's here is here for you to succeed. Odyssey has a great number of support systems in place, so use them! Only then can you truly persevere. Moreover, if you do end up falling behind, don't panic! Although not ideal, it's not

the end of the world; communicate with Emily and let her know what is happening in your life. One of the worst things you can do is go completely dark. Not only will people worry about you, but they won't be able to help you if they don't know what is going on. In addition, even if you fall behind on classwork, the most important part is to be present! Continue to go to class, continue to participate, and continue to ask questions! I cannot reiterate it enough: be curious, question everything, ask questions, and think critically of both what you are learning and your own bias that you may have on the matter.

Above all else, have fun! Odyssey is an incredibly inclusive environment for learning that touches many aspects of the humanities, from history, philosophy, writing, to much more. You will learn a lot throughout the year, and your mind will be opened to a lot of things you didn't know, so enjoy it! What's more, take notes of all of the new things that you learned while in Odyssey. It's incredibly rewarding to go back to your notes after a year of learning and see all of the tangible progress you have made. Sometimes it's easy to have everything fly by, but having notes on exactly what you learned is something I hope you find valuable like I did.

Before I let you go, I would be remiss if I didn't reiterate one more time to take full advantage of Odyssey and what it has to offer. One of the great gifts that comes with being a part of Odyssey is that you are a special student of UW Madison, one of the most prestigious universities in the country, possibly the world. As an Odyssey student, you are allowed to have a UW Student ID: use it! You are a student with the same privileges as any other student at UW. Go get discounts at the Union, go to the UW gyms, go to their programs, audit a class you would be interested in, play intramural sports, and go for a swim at the Natatorium. Everything on campus is open to you, so take advantage of it and, again, have fun. Congratulations on starting a new chapter of your life! **(Yael Jimenez Gonzalez)**





You can do this.
The Odyssey
Project
community is
amazing.

Everyone in this
class has grown

and grown a relationship with one
another. You did the hardest step.
You signed up. You got accepted.
You can do this.

My first day, I was so nervous. I
hadn't been in a learning
environment in over 18+ years. I
hadn't studied for a test, read a
chapter book, or sat in a class to
learn and focus. Can I do this? was
what I thought to myself. Luckily, I
knew a few people so that made it
a little easier. But throughout those two hours, I
met 30+ new friends.

Odyssey staff are the best. They're very dependable,
kind, and helpful. You made a great decision joining
the Odyssey family. You're going to see so many
changes in yourself, your reading, speaking, and
writing. I see my growth in my job; I actually read
my emails and articles that are given to me now.
Stay focused, and stay on top of your homework
assignments and reading. Ask for help no matter
what; help is what got me through a lot of my
procrastinating. I just had someone in tutoring go
over my work with me to get their opinions or to
help if I was stuck and didn't know where to start.
Definitely take advantage of their wonderful vibes. I
did it, and so can you! Believe in you.

(Crystal Johnson)



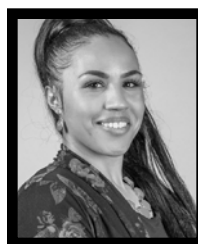
As you embark on this new journey
of self-discovery through literature
and a community of 30 of your
peers, I want you to be open to the
possibility that you're already a
good writer. You were never a bad
writer to begin with, and all you

need will be a little push in the right direction.

The Odyssey Project is a judgment-free zone. You



don't have to worry about having the proper
grammar, sentence structure, or the correct
pronunciation. All you need is the willingness to
learn and the willingness to be open minded. No
matter what you're going through, it will never get
downplayed or ignored. You can always ask for help
because help is never a negative word in the
Odyssey class. Help can just mean you need a little
push, you need a shoulder to cry on, you need help
with time management, or you just need a support
in life. You're always welcome, no matter your color,
sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious
background, because we are all a huge melting pot
of diversity and love. I hope you find the Odyssey
Project to be your wildest dreams. Welcome, Class
of 2023! **(Helena Lee)**



Please be ready to bring all of you
as you embark on an internal
journey. Get ready to unpack what
you thought was the truth and see
a new reality. The Odyssey Project
will bring you to a new awareness.
You will laugh, be enlightened, and

also get into your feelings. The people here have
soul, compassion, and so much to give. You'll be a
part of a community that keeps the weary growing
and going. You're a part of a chain of change.

(Michelle Mack)



Get ready to met new people and learn so many new things. Coming into Odyssey I did not know exactly what to expect, but I am happy I chose taking the steps for a better future. Through Odyssey I gained the confidence I needed to further my education, and now I'm more motivated than ever to continue until I'm where I want to be! I'm so proud of the woman I'm becoming, not only for me but for my daughter as well. Don't be scared to participate, ask questions, or give your opinions. Odyssey is a judge-free zone where everyone is welcome to be themselves! I wish you guys the best of luck and pray you enjoy Odyssey as much as I did. **(Mariam Maiga)**



Congratulations! The hard part is over. From this point on, you have a new family and added support team. You are not in this alone, so look around the classroom, make friends, and say hello to someone. I will tell you this, there have been times when I did not want to get out of bed. My son overdosed, my husband was in the hospital, and my dad's dementia was getting bad. I got up anyway and had an enjoyable time. A lot of the class assignments are like a form of therapy. Listening to my classmates and other speakers

made me feel like I am not the only one going through something. My biggest regret is the class days I missed. **(Mashell McCarter)**



Welcome to the next chapter of your life. You're here for character development, and that's absolutely true because this class will definitely develop your character.

The plot twist is even though it's class, trust me, by the time it's completed you will love yourself for completing.

The future is yours. Let Odyssey help you create an amazing ending to YOUR story. **(Reginald Moore)**



You have just done a good thing. Odyssey was one of the best decisions you could ever make; at least, it was for me. The best advice I could say is believe in yourself. You are your biggest cheerleader, and so is everyone here at Odyssey. They are here for you no matter what. The teachers here at Odyssey don't ever judge you on anything, no matter what you are going through. They are here for you. If there is something you need help with, they will help you or try to find a resource on whatever it is. Even the classmates help you; Odyssey is like a big, blended family.

I met a lot of different people from all walks of life at Odyssey: even some people I went to high school with. Just know that Emily will do anything in her power to make sure everyone is successful in their journey at Odyssey. It's definitely going to be a journey, but don't worry. Everyone at Odyssey is rooting for you, and so am I. Congrats! **(LaRonda Morris)**





Although I did not give all of me as I should have, even with my trust and commitment issues I have a new outlook. I have a new way of expressing myself. I have a new way of learning. I have learned so much about myself, pushing barriers I could never see myself crossing before. I express my opinions openly without judgment, and I let my writing skills come to light. Even with the toughness of my pregnancy and childbirth, I was still supported and loved. I was weeks behind because life caught up. But with tutoring and hard work, I was able to get things done. No matter the situation, Ms. Emily, the sweetest woman I know, was always screaming, “GO, CYLINTHIA, GO!” Give your 100 percent effort, and do not hold back. Express your fears and insecurities

and conquer them; you have made it this far.



WOW, you did it, Class of '23! You took the first step in your new journey. How did it feel? Was it a wobbly step? Was it full of uncertainty? Were you nervous the night before the first class?

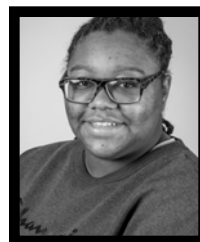
If the answer is yes, that's good. We all felt this way. You are not alone. In fact, you will never be alone again throughout this journey. Odyssey is a family. The instructors will always be available to you. The support is endless. Life might get crazy throughout the journey, but please trust the process. There is no judgment. The reward is great. The skills you will learn will unlock a power you didn't know you had in you. Some days will be harder than others. Some days you will have to dig deep. Do not quit because a better you waits on the other end. You've already taken the first step. Now take the second step. You are in motion. Welcome. **(Will Nunn)**



This is it, the beginning. This is the start to your journey, to want more, to do more. Like many of you, I was nervous my first time in class: new people, new surroundings, new challenges. But, you see, this is more than just a humanities course! This is a family; I have gained the best group of supporters in this program. I have truly gained a new family, a new opportunity, and a new life in this program.

They receive hundreds of applications. This program is not for the weak, only for the strong. I do not mean in the way you think either. I mean the strength of the ability to face your fears and challenges, making them come to pass. So, congratulations! You walked into the first step of changing your life forever. Have a great year. I am also here for support! My number and email will never change! Here's to the long walk!

Welcome to the family! **(Cylinthia Olle)**



Are you nervous? Do you feel less than capable of completing this program? Well, don't be. There are plenty of staff members and alumni to help you along your journey. Whether starting or continuing your education, this is a great place to start. This course not only will help you get a fresh start to get your feet wet, it will follow you throughout your educational journey. For example, if you have to write a science thesis or even do public speaking, this course will help you flourish. As a student in the Odyssey Program, you can look forward to certain scholarship programs or even funds to start your own business. This is a wonderful opportunity and a great start with the six college credits that you will gain in the end. **(Kimari Rogers)**



Welcome to a community of encouragement and support! Yes, you are here, you made it! Today is the day to know that you are not alone because your peers, teachers, and alumni will be here to encourage you to reach the

best version of yourself. The Odyssey Project was created by people like you and me, and it is an opportunity to grow personally and academically. Time passes by fast, so do your assignments, ask for help, and enjoy the evenings with this wonderful community! **(Jessica Saldana)**



Hey, guys! Welcome to Odyssey. I know how you may be feeling, nervous or excited, just praying to make it to the end? Ask me how I know: because I was you! Odyssey is nothing to be afraid of. There will seem like lots of work to do,

but with Emily, Char, Kevin, and the gang, you've got this! You can do it and when you do, you'll be proud of the person you have become. You'll love all the people you have met, and the fun family events help bring us all closer together. If you are shy, they will help you overcome that; you will be encouraged to use your voice.

I would like to say congratulations on getting into the program, don't give up, take it one day at a time, and remember your instructors are there to help and support you. Odyssey is a great opportunity and the year really goes fast, so enjoy the journey and good luck!

(Naquila Taylor)



This FAMILY is for EVERYBODY! I call this a family and not a class because that is what you will become with your classmates. You will form a bond with some of them that will be unbreakable.

Upon walking into class the first day, you will feel like maybe you shouldn't be here. There will be people in the class from all walks of life, and therefore you SHOULD be there. You will find out in the duration of this class that you have much more in common with your classmates than you could ever realize, and that is how they will become your family. Remember that your family is much larger than just this class because alumni are here for you as well.

All of you are here because you wanted this, so I congratulate you. You have just chosen an Odyssey that will change your life. Now don't get it wrong, you will work for this wonderful journey, but it will be well worth it. There will never be a time that you can't ask for help, please remember that. Every professor that you have is there for YOU. Their goal is for you to complete this Odyssey.

(Mechele Williams)



JOIN THE UW ODYSSEY PROJECT

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

- be at least 18
- have a high school degree, G.E.D., or H.S.E.D. prior to July 1, 2022
- 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



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, including tuition, textbooks, and other expenses associated with Onward Odyssey and the core Odyssey course.

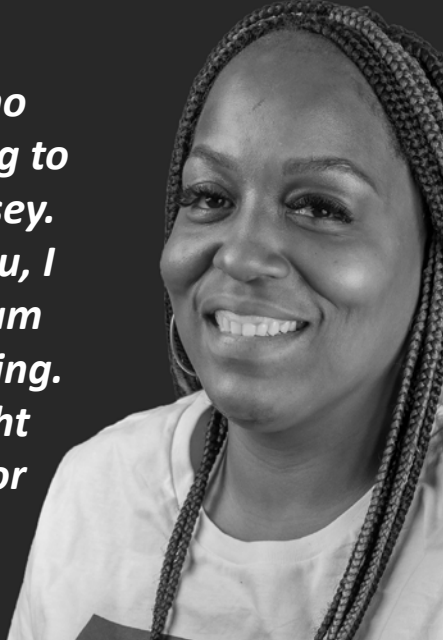
THE FRIENDS OF ODYSSEY FAMILY FUND

This fund supports Odyssey Junior and helps families with basic living expenses, tech needs, and unanticipated emergencies.

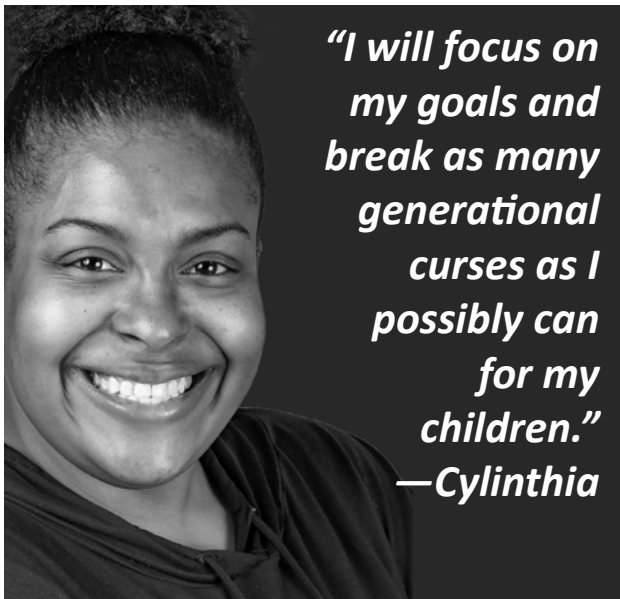
THE ODYSSEY BEYOND BARS FUND

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

"I thank everybody who had something to do with Odyssey. Because of you, I know what I am capable of doing. Odyssey taught me to reach for the universe."
—LaRonda



Find uwodyysseyproject on:



"I will focus on my goals and break as many generational curses as I possibly can for my children."
—Cylinthia

WAYS TO GIVE

Online: odyssey.wisc.edu/support

By check: make payable to UW Foundation. Please be sure to write the fund name on the memo line.

Mail to:

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

By phone: 800-443-6162

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

MEMORIAL AND HONORARY STUDENT PRIZES

LISA MUNRO TWO-GENERATION SCHOLARSHIP

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

The 2022 winner is Hezouwe Walada. When Hezouwe was growing up in rural Togo, West Africa, he craved learning so much that he walked 30 miles daily without shoes, his feet bleeding, to attend the closest village school. Hezouwe brought that persistence with him when he emigrated to America, completed the Odyssey Project and Badger Ready, and went on to become a pre-med student at UW-Madison. Hezouwe is close to completing his bachelor's degree in Biochemistry from UW-Madison while juggling work and family. This award will help Hezouwe with his studies and fund educational activities for his seven-year-old daughter.



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, the Auerbach family established an endowment to support prizes to all graduating students each year.

To donate to either 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.

SHARON STARK SCHOLARSHIP

Sharon Stark and 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."

When Sharon visited class, she met Crystal Johnson, selected as the first Sharon Stark Odyssey Scholar. Other students in the Class of 2022 are Evjue, Brittingham, or Anonymous Committee scholars through sponsorships by those philanthropic organizations. We hope to link all 30 students in the Class of 2023, our 20th year, to sponsors covering their expenses. Interested donors can meet the student they sponsor and choose to honor or remember someone special in their lives.



"Odyssey helped me start back reading and stimulating my mind, thinking outside the box, challenging myself to be great, and giving my all."
—Crystal Johnson '22

DIANE WALTON RESILIENCY AWARD

Last year, Odyssey Class of 2021 student Diane Walton inspired everyone with her battle to be a lifelong learner literally to her last breath. She joined class by Zoom from the hospital, the sound of monitors beeping as she read the part of Mama from *A Raisin in the Sun*. Too weak to hold a pen, she dictated poems over the phone to Emily Auerbach. Diane watched the graduation ceremony from her bed at Agrace Hospice Care, succumbing to cancer a week later.



Char Braxton took Diane her Odyssey certificate and graduation gifts in the hospital.

Inspired by her courage, an anonymous donor established a Diane Walton Resiliency Award. The plan was to select one 2022 student to receive a \$1,000 award. However, Odyssey leadership made the decision instead to give smaller awards to every graduating student in the Class of 2022. Several students battled homelessness, one lost her mother, a dozen suffered from COVID, one required leg surgery landing him in a wheelchair, many fought severe depression, one tended to an adult son who overdosed, two went to jail, one feared deportation, others parented gravely ill children, and many lost work, lost loved ones, lost relationships, and almost lost hope. We hope the incredibly resilient Class of 2022 will carry with them a piece of Diane Walton's indomitable spirit.



This is the image my mind captures when I think of not being held down by the world's burdens, living on my own terms, having wings to fly that take me to beautiful places.—Naquila Taylor



I'm broken in so many ways, but I'm becoming, growing, changing, transitioning, like a butterfly.—Crystal Johnson



I pray over you Munchkins nightly and thank God for allowing me to be your father. I will travel universes for all three of you. I love my family. —Ontario Frazier



