

From: [Campus Climate Proposal form](#)
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Subject: New submission from Campus Climate Proposals
Date: Monday, May 02, 2016 8:25:53 AM

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Group name (if applicable):

The UW Odyssey Project

What is your affiliation with UW-Madison? For group submissions, please respond for main contact.

- Faculty

Describe the concept. If already in use here or elsewhere, please indicate this.

" [REDACTED] ."

This story was shared by a student in the UW Odyssey Project which offers two sequential, three-credit humanities courses that help adults living at the poverty level "jumpstart" their college education and rediscover the joy of learning. "The Odyssey Project helped me unwrap my gifts and rewrite the story of my life," reflected one African American single parent. Over our 13-year history we have seen two-thirds of alumni continue their education; over 30 complete two-year, four-year, or graduate degrees; and some even journey from homelessness to master's degrees.

We are often asked about the value of a humanities course—focused on literature, history, philosophy, and art—to the poor. The model is based on the need to overcome an "inner poverty" that can fuel hopelessness in the daily struggles of our students, be it housing insecurity, hunger, racism, substance abuse, or violence. We use the power of storytelling—reading powerful works of literature, acting out scenes of plays, and writing and reading aloud personal stories—to help our students contextualize their thoughts and experiences within a larger history of ideas. Through Odyssey, students also find their voices, explore their histories, and imagine their futures.

Over the years we have sought opportunities for our students to engage with other UW students in a variety of ways, using storytelling to connect students with such vastly different backgrounds. Craig Werner, Chair of Afro-American Studies and Odyssey Project faculty member, shared that the cohort of Odyssey students that enrolled in his Black Music and American Culture class greatly changed the dynamic of the course for the better by bringing their perspectives and life experiences as African Americans into the classroom. Recently we have also formed a partnership with the School of Medicine and Public Health through its Public Health Integrative Cases program that we are calling "Prescription for Change." Twelve Odyssey alumni shared essays on their experiences in the healthcare system. Seventy first-year medical students then read and reflected on these essays in writing and participated in

small group discussions. Odyssey students' stories about dismissive physicians and their struggles to access affordable services and prescriptions brought issues to life in a way that lectures and textbooks cannot. Medical student [REDACTED] shared, "I am so appreciative of the people who took time to share these stories. I think they will stick with me through medical school as I begin to see more patients and learn their stories. We all deserve to be seen and heard, to receive care and be treated fairly, regardless of our economic situation."

Humans have used storytelling across the millennia to build relationships, pass on history, and persuade audiences. Paul Zak, scientist and author of "The Moral Molecule: the Source of Love and Prosperity," has shown that storytelling done well (with compelling character development and story arc) produces the neurochemical oxytocin that enables us to empathize with the storyteller or story's protagonist. Cultural competency training often involves storytelling for this very reason, as "analyzing stories enables the learner to look at real people in real situations, in all their complexity—personality, age, gender, ethnicity, religious tradition, nationality—rather than as one-dimensional generalizations or stereotypes" (Diane Hofner Saphiere of the Cultural Detective Blog).

We propose creating Odyssey Storytellers—a unique resource for faculty, staff, and students—wherein Odyssey students and alumni can be invited to engage with students in coursework and other environments, such as student housing and summer orientation programs. This project builds on the Prescription for Change model with SMPH, making Odyssey students available to share their stories on a wide range of subjects, including race and racism; cultural identity; poverty; substance, domestic, and sexual abuse; environmental and food justice; education; healthcare; business; government; justice system; immigration; xenophobia; sexism and gender; and many other subjects. Odyssey students are predominantly from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (approximately 95%), and as a result there is often an intersection between the wide range of stories that Odyssey students can share and issues of race, culture, and identity.

The subjects that Odyssey students can speak about lend themselves to a wide variety of potential courses where students could engage. We would advertise Odyssey Storytellers to all faculty, staff, and student groups and work to reach diverse groups of learners in subjects such as history, business, English, mass communication, education, law, medicine, economics, political science, social work, and much more. These engagements would vary in length and format depending on the course or other program needs, from a one-time talk to a longer-term workshop that more closely connects Odyssey Storytellers with other UW students.

How would this affect cultural change on campus?

The Odyssey Storytelling Project would affect campus cultural change in several ways. The project would offer faculty, researchers, staff, and students the ability to engage with people of color and other disenfranchised groups who very much want to share their personal experiences with race and identity. UW students of color are often put on the spot in the classroom and other settings to speak on behalf of their particular racial or ethnic group. This week the Capital Times quoted one student's tweet to #TheRealUW that captures many students' frustration with this often unwanted role: "#TheRealUW is wanting the same tuition from all students, yet expecting minorities to teach impromptu crash courses on racism free of charge." Odyssey Storytellers come prepared to share very personal stories and to engage in difficult, honest dialogues with UW students.

Additionally, they come with rich life experiences, ranging in age from Odyssey Junior children and teens to 70-year olds. Odyssey Storytellers offer a breadth of age and experience beyond the makeup of UW students in a typical classroom. "Odyssey has a diversity like no other," commented one current student, reflecting the fact that the Odyssey Class of 2016 includes Muslim refugees from Iraq; a Hmong student from a polygamous home; single mothers and teen parents; a transgender, undocumented Latina student; African American students from 18 to 60 coming from Louisiana, the Chicago housing projects, and elsewhere; formerly incarcerated students; students raised in foster homes; and students with bipolar, other mental illnesses, and learning disorders.

The stories will be captured not only in the classroom and other campus spaces, but also on video, radio,

and written form to reach thousands across campus and beyond. We propose working with partners including Madison 365 and campus journalism faculty and student groups, such as The Black Voice, to help us share these stories. We will share stories through radio programs on WORT and WPR where Professor Auerbach co-hosts University of the Air. Lastly, we will share the stories that emerge through this project through the Odyssey webpage and Facebook page, through Continuing Studies' Twitter and Facebook accounts, through The Lifelong Learner blog, and press releases to Inside UW and a variety of local and regional media outlets. Our social media strategy, developed by experts in Continuing Studies' Integrated Marketing and Communications, will be especially important considering the role social media has played in bringing incidents of bias and hate to light through #TheRealUW.

How can these stories meaningfully effect change? Bringing real people with real stories into the classroom, dorms, and other campus spaces will create authentic connections between our storytellers and UW students that will help foster empathy toward others that can otherwise be difficult to nurture. For example, when Juanita Wilson, now 81, shared her story of being turned away from Evanston Hospital while in labor, told to go to Cook County hospital because she was black, UW students' eyes widened and heartfelt dialogue followed.

For new ideas, how would you propose piloting this idea to see if it would work? If the idea is already in use at UW-Madison, how would you propose expanding or altering this program for greater impact?

We propose scaling up the Odyssey Storytellers project between Summer 2016 through academic year 2016-2017. This program growth builds on our past experiences, including the Prescription for Change program and other past engagements with Odyssey students on campus.

- In Summer 2016 we will arrange at least 10 Odyssey Storytelling engagements in at least 3 settings (courses or other campus groups), reaching at least 250 students.
- In Fall 2016 this will grow to at least 50 Storytelling engagements in at least 8 settings, reaching at least 1,500 students. This jump in student reach reflects that at least one engagement will be with a larger audience such as a large lecture course.
- By Spring 2017 this will grow to at least 100 engagements in at least 20 settings reaching at least 4,000 students. This increase in student reach would include two or three larger audiences.

In addition to these students reached in person, we will reach thousands across campus as well as thousands beyond campus through our traditional and social media outreach.

What resources would be needed to implement your suggestion?

Between Summer 2016 – fall 2017 we estimate a total budget of \$85,000. This breaks down by semester as follows: Summer 2016: \$15,000; Fall 2016: \$30,000; Spring 2017: \$40,000. We would continually evaluate the project and adjust plans for each semester based on what we have learned as the project progresses. Costs included within these budget estimates include: stipends for Odyssey Storytellers, program development and management, and marketing and communication (including sharing stories to both broad and targeted UW audiences through varied media platforms).

If this proposal was developed in partnership with any other organizations, please list them below.

The Odyssey Project has many campus partners who will help us make Odyssey Storyteller engagements. We are co-sponsored by the Division of Continuing Studies and the English Department and both offer many resources and relationships across campus and beyond. Professor Auerbach's role as co-host of WPR's University of the Air has helped her build a broad network of faculty across campus. The School of Medicine and Public Health is our partner in Prescription for Change and they have separately proposed expansion of that program through this request for proposals, which we strongly support. Odyssey Storytellers will also help us to expand our partnership with the student group Slow Food UW and non-profit Growing Power, founded by the Macarthur Genius-award winner Will Allen. Slow Food UW interns collaborate with Odyssey Project and Odyssey Junior students weekly, sharing a meal and exchanging ideas around food as it relates to culture, economics, health, and the environment. Our other established campus partnerships that can help us to expand Odyssey Storytellers include the UW South Madison Partnership, Chazen Museum of Art, the Morgridge Center for Public Service, and many campus academic departments.

Please use this space for any additional information about your proposal that you wish to share:

[REDACTED]

Stories like this one from Odyssey graduate Eugene Smalls remind us of the power of stories to open our hearts and, in turn, open our minds. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share this proposal and to consider the part that the Odyssey Project can play in creating authentic human connections that can help make our campus more inclusive to all.