

Emory Oaks Program Report

2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STENZEN CON

Pg. 3

Introduction

Pg. 4

Our History

Pg. 5-6

Oaks Participants

Pg. 7-8

Oaks Evaluation Survey

Pg. 9-10

Belonging & Supports Accessed

Pg. 11-12

Program Records & Activities

Pg. 13-14

Community & Affiliated Activities

Pg. 15

Emory Campus Partners

Pg. 16

Emory Oaks Impact

Pg. 17

Program Staff

Pg. 18

Acknowledgements

What is Emory Oaks?

Emory Oaks (Oaks) is a College Autism Support Program for autistic students at Emory University that relies on Support Navigation, an individualized support system that includes advising, coaching, goal setting, and progress monitoring. Students meet with an Oaks staff member regularly (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) to develop a positive and affirming relationship, learning about the student's strengths, interests and goals. Collaboratively, the student and Oaks staff member set goals, develop action plans, and monitor progress. Emory Oaks is similar to programs that are part of the College Autism Network and as described in Nachman, McDermott and Cox's report (2022) on college autism support programs.

Oaks understands that autistic students often benefit from having partnership and collaboration in accessing existing supports and systems. Oaks staff partner with students, facilitate introductions, and model self-advocacy, social initiation, and relationship building in a safe and supportive space. In addition, Oaks provides training and support throughout the University and the community so that autistic students may engage in spaces that are welcoming and inclusive.

The vision of Emory Oaks is that every autistic student at Emory has a thriving, positive, goal directed experience; achieves a sense of belonging and community; and graduates with a clear and successful plan towards employment, career development or further education.

OUR HISTORY



Support for autistic students at Emory University began at the Emory Autism Center in 2015, initially as an individual counseling service. Between 2015 and 2020, Emory Oaks annually supported between 2 and 4 autistic students at Emory University, working with a total of 9 students (7 undergraduate, 2 graduate students) during that time.

2015

Began support for autistic Emory students (supported 9 students between 2015 and 2020)

FALL 2020

Federal funding through a subaward from UGA to participate in a 12-month planning grant

FALL 2021

Oaks and grant team awarded a 3-year implementation grant to launch the pilot model

2022

Official launch of Emory Oaks, accompanied by the hiring of a full-time staff member

FALL 2025

Oaks officially welcomes its first trainee and launches a Program Fee

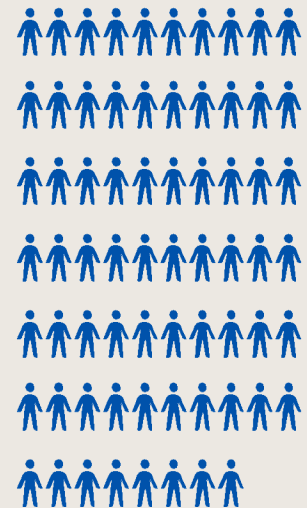
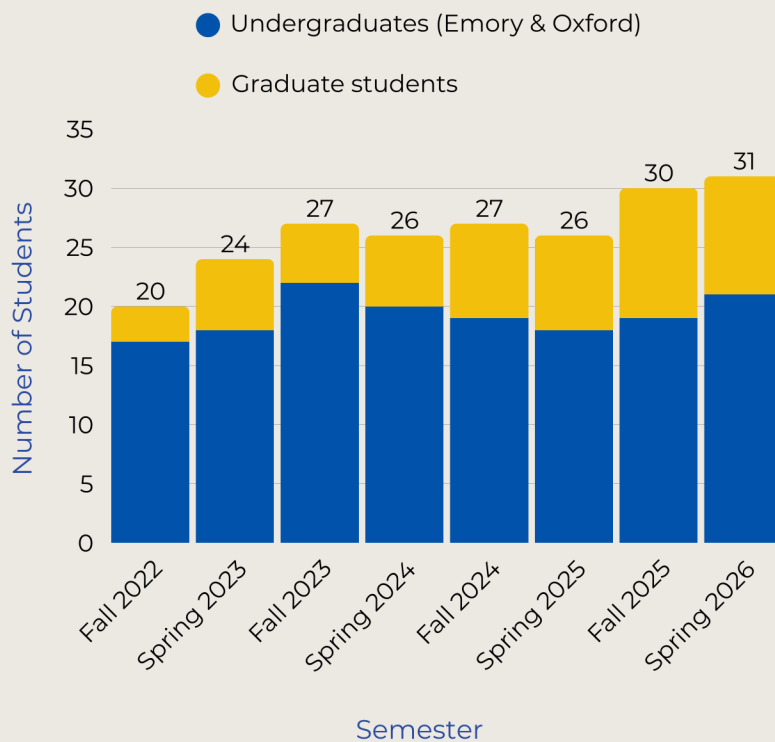
OAKS PARTICIPANTS

For general Emory Oaks program operations and record keeping, we collect data and information about our student participants and program activities.

How many students have we supported?

Growth over time:

Since Fall 2022, Emory oaks has supported 68 unique students.



68 students
since Fall 2022

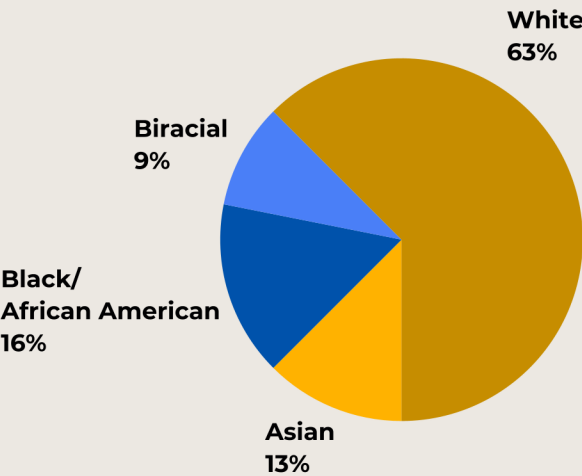
The program also keeps a modest waitlist of between 5 and 10 students.

OAKS PARTICIPANTS

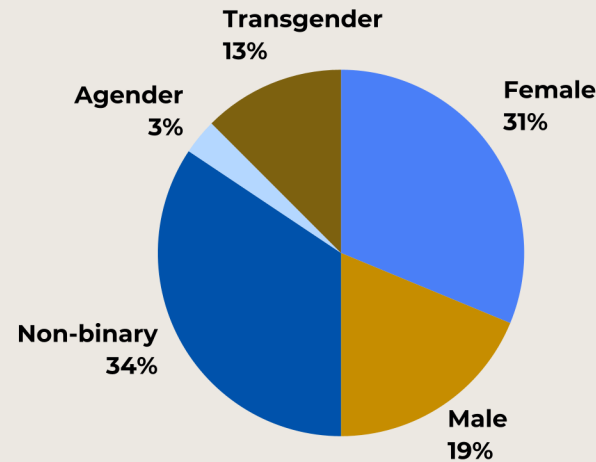
Program Demographics

We collect demographic information both through our Program Evaluation survey and available Emory University data. Below is a snap-shot of our program’s diversity for the 2025-2026 academic year.

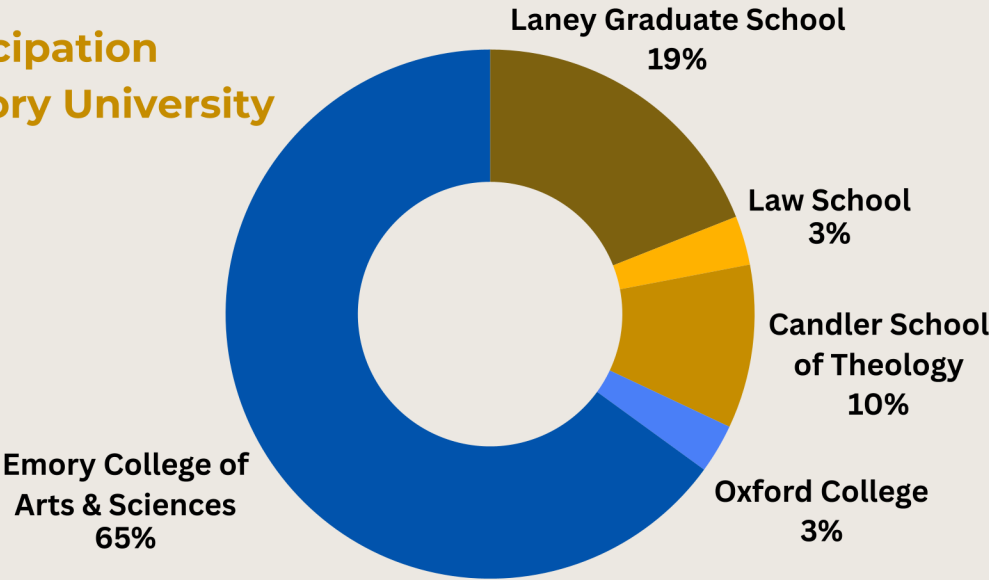
Ethnicity/Race



Gender



Oaks Participation across Emory University



OAKS PROGRAM EVALUATION SURVEY

Internal program evaluation is critical to the sustainability and growth of Emory Oaks. Based on the evaluation tool that was developed by the Georgia College Transition Partnership (i.e., the grant that initially helped launch Emory Oaks in Fall 2021), our team, in consultation with our Student Advisory Board, has developed an internal Emory Oaks Program Evaluation survey.



Of the 31 students and recent graduates invited to participate,
22 students responded.

Emory Oaks participants, via the Emory Oaks Program Evaluation survey, share information about the **services they access**, their **experience of community and belonging**, and their **self-assessment of wellness, academic success, and career preparation.**

Participants also share specific feedback about their experience with Emory Oaks, including what is working well and areas for change and growth.



77% of respondents indicate that their **experience with Emory Oaks is “very positive.”**

Over 77% of respondents report that they “often” or “always” **“have the support I need to achieve my goals.”**

About 91% of respondents indicate that they “often” or “always” feel that they will **“remain enrolled continuously through graduation.”**

More than 95% of respondents indicate that they **know their plans for after graduation.**

WHAT OUR STUDENTS ARE SAYING

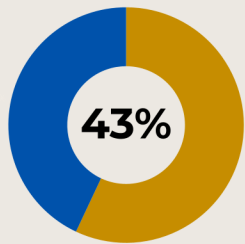
The quotes below are examples of qualitative feedback shared by our program participants in Spring 2026:



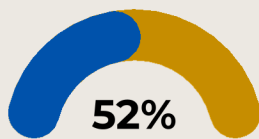
COMMUNITY & SELF-DETERMINATION

Quality of life, **community connection**, and **peer support** are all key components of Emory Oaks. Understanding how Oaks' students describe their interactions with their peers and their sense of belonging at Emory helps Oaks staff better **tailor our support for students**, individually and as a group. As shown below, **we have work to do!** Oaks is eager to rise to the challenge to learn more and support our students in increasing their community connections, self-advocacy, and sense of belonging at Emory.

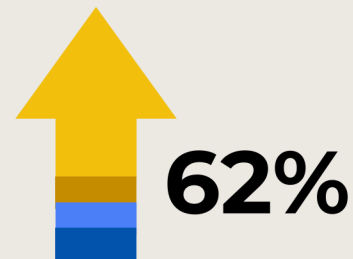
Community & Belonging



of participants report that they **often** or **always** feel **connected to their peers**



of students report that they **always** have at **least one friend** at Emory



62% of respondents report that they **often** or **always** have a **peer group** where **they belong**

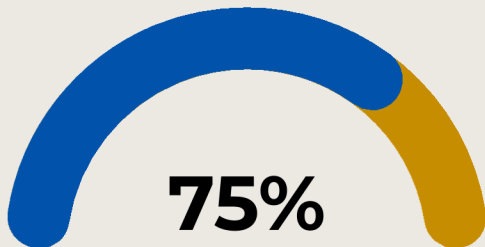
62% of respondents **also** report **often** or **always** having a **positive sense of belonging** at Emory University

Self-Determination

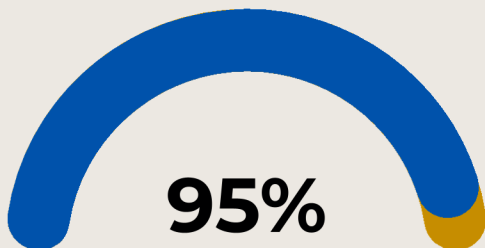
Survey Question	% Responding "Often" or "Always"
"I have set concrete goals for myself"	67%
"I can advocate for the academic accommodation that I need"	62%

ACCESSING SUPPORTS

Supports (on campus or in the community)	% of Respondents who Report Accessing Support (within the last year)
Academic Accommodations	86%
Mental Health Counseling	43%
Academic Coaching	19%
Career & Professional Development Coaching	29%



of students report that they feel **“somewhat positive”** or **“very positive”** about their overall **Emory University** experience



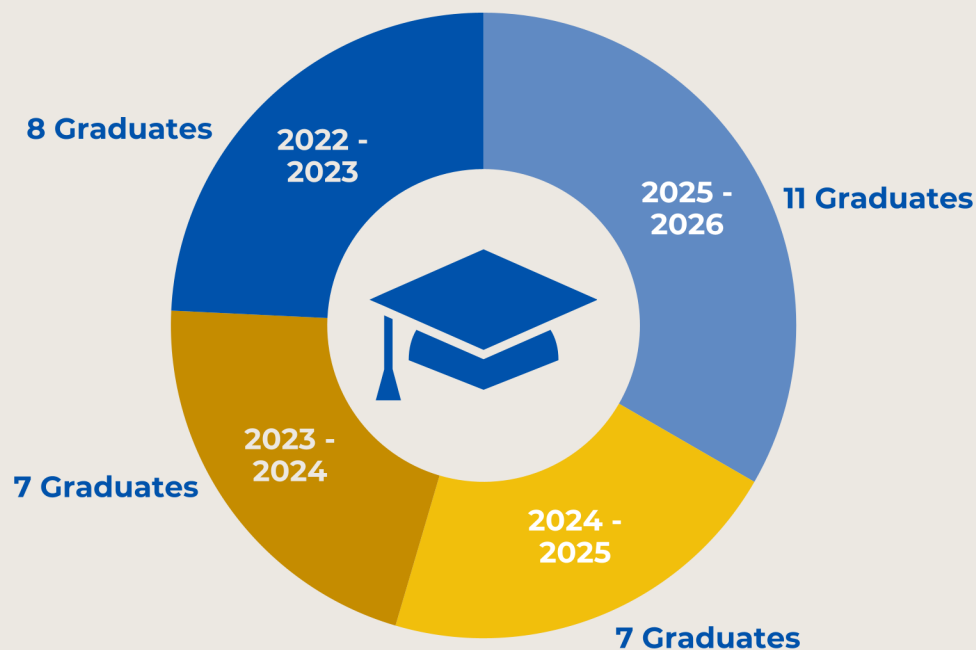
of students report that they feel **“somewhat positive”** or **“very positive”** about their experience with **Emory Oaks**

INTERNAL PROGRAM EVALUATION AND RECORDS

Retention and Graduation

Prior to our program launch in Fall 2022, many students had connected to Emory Oaks because of challenging experiences and outcomes at Emory University; these include experiencing mental health crises, taking time off from the University, academic probation or suspension, conduct problems, or significant risk for any of these. **Since Fall 2022, all Emory Oaks participants have remained enrolled at Emory University.**

Total Number of Emory Oaks Graduates by Academic Year



73%

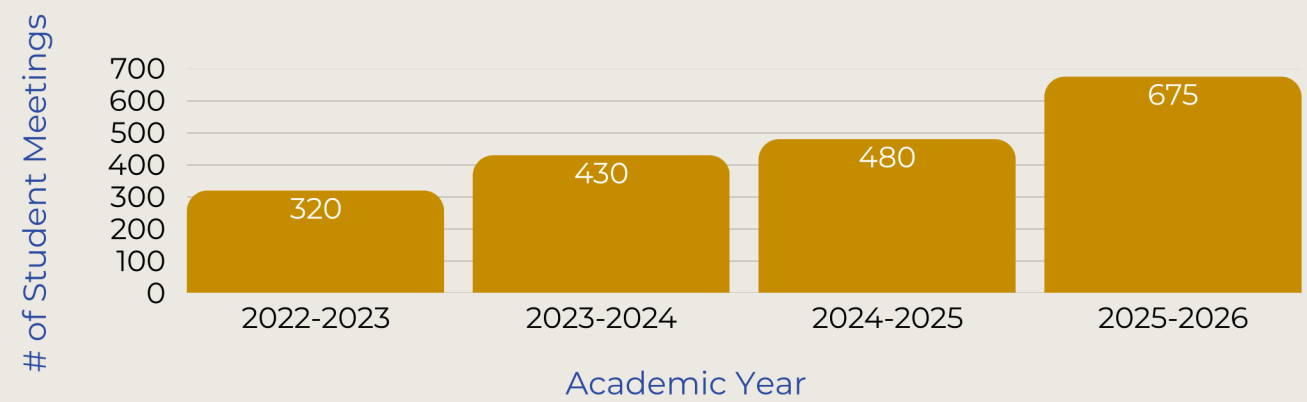
of our graduating students have had clear and concrete post-graduation plans, such as internships, “gap year” paid employment, admission to graduate or professional school, or full-time competitive employment (far exceeding national employment estimates for autistic adults).

All Oaks participants from the 2025-2026 academic year graduated either early or on-time.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Emory University students, staff and faculty and the larger post-secondary education community enjoy significant access to our program staff.

Student Meetings



Student Support & Engagement

Book Club

Students and alumni read and discussed *The Autism Industrial Complex* by Alicia Broderick.

Social Events

This year, we had a great time connecting and hanging out while painting ceramics.

Body-Doubling

Oaks hosted body-doubling sessions this year: a way to complete work in a low-stakes environment with others.

Support Group

A space to discuss daily on-campus challenges and successes; connect with peers.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Parent Engagement



Oaks was thrilled to launch its parent engagement features in the 2025-26 school year. In the fall, we held 3 listening sessions, during which parents met virtually to learn more about Oaks and to provide feedback on a vision for future parent engagement meetings. In the spring, our group met monthly. These meetings included welcoming guest speakers (e.g., from Emory Pathways Center, from the College Autism Network), sharing resources and wisdom amongst Oaks parents, and fostering connection and community.

Student Advisory Board



Oaks convenes a Student Advisory Board that meets monthly. The Student Advisory Board, featuring 4 Oaks participants, provides feedback and input on an array of topics, such as social engagement and event planning, Oaks program evaluation, and community needs. Our student leaders on the Student Advisory Board help us to stay grounded, student-centered, and affirming.

Trainings & Presentations

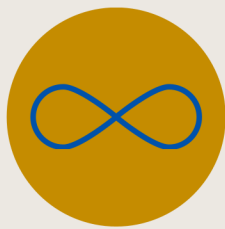


Whether within the Emory community, the larger Atlanta and Georgia community, or other audiences throughout the US, there is a great need for information about how to best support autistic college students. Oaks staff enjoys the opportunity to lead these presentations and disseminate critical information about this population. In addition, high school students, families, and educators need current information about preparing for college and selecting the best fit environment. Since 2022, Oaks staff have provided over 50 trainings and presentations to faculty, staff, families, and community organizations.

AFFILIATED ACTIVITIES

Emory Oaks is an active and engaged leader in a number of critical affiliated activities at Emory University that promote inclusion and belonging.

Autism Celebration Month



Since its inaugural year (2021), Emory Oaks leadership has chaired the Planning Committee of Emory University's Autism Celebration Month events. Typical events include an autistic student panel, a research symposium, featuring autistic researchers, and opening and closing events, such as student interest showcases and a graduation celebration. The Planning Committee is a diverse group of Emory University neurodivergent and neurotypical students, staff, and faculty working together to plan and host a set of in-person and virtual events. More information from past years can be found at the [Autism Celebration Month website](#).

Reflections on Neurodiversity



In 2019, the Emory University Institute for Liberal Arts hosted a faculty workgroup that developed a new undergraduate seminar entitled Reflections on Neurodiversity. Dr. Segall, who was part of that original workgroup, has taught the class 2021-2024, with Kelsey Bohlke (Emory Oaks Assistant Director) joining as his co-instructor from 2022-2024. The seminar-style course embraces an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the concept of neurodiversity and invites a wide range of guest speaker experts across disciplines and topics. Since 2021, we have also successfully advocated for funding from the Emory Center for Faculty Development and Excellence to be able to offer a small stipend to our neurodivergent guest lecturers. The course is currently on hiatus, pending future funding for the course.

Autism Advocacy Organization



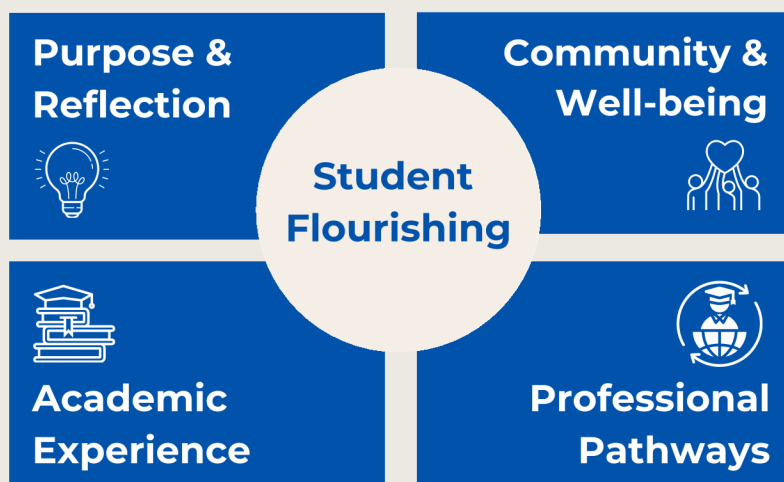
In 2018, a small group of neurodiverse students at Oxford College formed the beginnings of a student organization at Emory focused on spreading awareness and promoting inclusion for autistic students. Since 2019, Dr. Segall has been the faculty advisor for the Emory Autism Advocacy Organization; the student organization was recognized with its initial charter in 2022. In 2022, AAO elected its first autistic president, a tradition the continues currently. Dr. Segall meets frequently with the organization leadership to provide leadership mentoring and coaching, and many Emory Oaks participants engage with AAO for social and leadership opportunities.

EMORY CAMPUS PARTNERS

Emory Oaks has proudly established genuine and positive relationships with many offices, departments and support services throughout the Emory University fabric. Below is a table, highlighting many of our partnerships.

		
Office for Undergraduate Education Pathways Center Oxford Advising Support Center Department of Accessibility Services Residence Life & Housing Office of Respect Title IX Office	Laney Graduate School Rollins School of Public Health School of Medicine School of Nursing Goizueta Business School Emory Law School	Counseling and Psychological Services Student Health Psychiatry Center for Student Wellbeing Belonging & Social Justice Communities Autism Advocacy Organization (AAO) Student Case Management & Intervention Services

STUDENT FLOURISHING



The activities and philosophies of Emory Oaks are strongly aligned with the **Student Flourishing** initiative at Emory University. In fact, support for a funded pilot of Emory Oaks was on a short list of recommendations presented to the Provost from the Academic Access Student Flourishing Workstream in 2021. Within Emory Oaks, the domains of Academic Experience, Professional Pathways, Purpose and Reflection, and Community and Well-Being all overlap and intertwine in ways that is authentic to the vision of Student Flourishing.

EMORY OAKS IMPACT



Emory Oaks is a **thriving** and **growing** college autism support program at Emory University, currently dedicated to helping **over 30 autistic** undergraduate and graduate students flourish in their academic journeys.

Challenges with the College Experience

For many autistic students attending colleges and universities without tailored support programs, **the college experience is *incredibly* difficult.**

Many autistic students encounter feelings of isolation, rejection, and anxiety, as well as difficulties with executive functioning.

They may experience mental health challenges, or **face barriers** to access of support services, which can lead to leaves of absence, difficulty maintaining their program of study, extended timelines to graduation, **and even the risk of not graduating at all.**



Emory Oaks is here to bridge that gap. Offering a supportive network and a genuine sense of community, Emory Oaks helps protect students from these unwanted outcomes and **sets the stage** for students to **achieve** the goals *they* set. Emory Oaks strives to foster a **sense of belonging**, and prepares students **to lead exciting and successful** careers as alumni.

There is no other entity at Emory University that provides these essential support services for autistic students. We are proud to stand alongside our students on their journey to success!

PROGRAM STAFF



Matt Segall, PhD - *Director of Emory Oaks*

Dr. Segall is a licensed Psychologist and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in the Emory University School of Medicine. He is the Program Director for Education and Transition Services at the Emory Autism Center. Dr. Segall is the Faculty Advisor for the Emory Autism Advocacy Organization, the current Chair of Emory University's Autism Celebration Month Planning Committee, and the current co-Instructor for Emory University's undergraduate seminar, *Reflections on Neurodiversity*. He is also part of the College Autism Network's Consultants' Collective, and serves at the Administrative Director for that group of national experts and consultants.



Kelsey Bohlke, LPC - *Assistant Director of Emory Oaks*

Kelsey Bohlke, MS, is the Assistant Director for Emory Oaks, a program to help autistic students navigate Emory University during their time on campus. She also partners with other on-campus departments and organizations to ensure they feel confident in their ability to support and include neurodiverse students in the campus community. She is the co-instructor for Emory University's undergraduate seminar, *Reflections on Neurodiversity*. Ms. Bohlke received her BA from Emory University and an MS from Georgia State University.



Charis "Kay" Rodgers, MS - *Support Navigator (Trainee)*

Charis "Kay" Rodgers, MS, (she/her) is the 2025–2026 trainee Support Navigator for Emory Oaks and a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the Clinical Psychology program at Mercer University. She has over five years of experience working with autistic individuals in research, assessment and therapeutic settings. As a Black neurodivergent future psychologist, she is passionate about the intersections of neurodivergence, self-esteem, race and culture and mental health. At Emory Oaks, Kay provides one-on-one student support, facilitates the weekly support group and body doubling sessions, and assists with Oaks projects and events.



River Somerville - *Emory Oaks Work Study Student*

River is Emory Oaks' Work Study student! They are a third-year student in the College and majoring in Environmental Science and History. They also love to draw and explore nature. Within Emory Oaks, River creates our monthly newsletter, compiles resources for autistic students, and runs Emory Oaks' social media.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all of the **students, families, and colleagues** who have trusted us to support you and learn from you. We are grateful for our partners and colleagues at the **University of Georgia** and at **Georgia State University** who helped us launch **Emory Oaks**, and we are appreciative of our wonderful colleagues throughout all of **Emory University** who stand with us as supporters and allies. We specifically wish to acknowledge the **Emory University Office of the Provost** who has championed our work and provided our program with bridge-funding for the 2024-2025 school year: thank you for valuing our work! Thank you to our **Student Advisory Board** for your feedback and leadership. Our program is a proud member of the **College Autism Network (CAN)**, and we greatly value the open sharing of guidance, resources, and encouragement from all of our **CAN** colleagues. To all of the **autistic adults and students** who have supported our work and provided input, we thank you: we hope our work continues to honor your voice and your insights.

This report was prepared by:
Matt Segall (Emory Autism Center)
Kelsey Bohlke (Emory Autism Center)
Virginia Cross (Rollins School of Public Health, class of 2026)
Awo Farah (Rollins School of Public Health, class of 2027)

Contact Us

oaks@emory.edu

404-727-8350

<https://oaks.emory.edu>

Follow us on Instagram: [@emory.oaks](https://www.instagram.com/emory.oaks)

