

**Name:** Molly Walding

**Year:** 04

**Major:** Public Relations

**Qualifications:**

Chi Omega Alpha Beta Recruitment Chair

Auburn University Student Recruiter

Auburn High School YoungLife Leader

Campaigners Bible Study Leader

**Platform:** My platform “*Make Your Mark with Molly,*” aims to raise awareness for the Auburn Office of Accessibility resources on campus by encouraging students to leave their *mark* on Auburn by sharing their story. In fifth grade, I was diagnosed with a cholesteatoma, a cyst that grows in your inner ear. The cyst had deteriorated all the bones in my inner ear, leaving me with *less* than 50% hearing even after 10 surgeries to remove it. I never wanted to acknowledge it through elementary or high school as I didn’t want to be different. I was encouraged to let Auburn know about my struggle to hear when I arrived. The Office of Accessibility opened the door for me to get the help I needed and not feel ashamed of my difference. I believe Auburn has a lot of silent sufferers who might have a physical need, emotional struggles or learning challenges but keep silent for the reasons I did.

The Auburn Office of Accessibility wants to meet each person where they are. They acknowledge that students who have disabilities are unique assets that *make* up the Auburn Family. Their mission is to work collaboratively with students, faculty, staff, and community to reduce barriers, creating a more usable, accessible campus and learning environment. Through academic accommodations, assistive technology, support services, and student, faculty, and staff training, students are given the opportunity to learn and grow.

The three focuses of my platform will be *Make, Your, and Mark*. I want to *make* current and prospective Auburn University students aware of the accommodations the Office of Accessibility offers. As a Student Recruiter for the university, I noticed that parents are concerned with their child’s unique struggles, but the child is ashamed to start the conversation.

My second focus is to normalize students' unique challenges so you can feel free to share *your* own personal stories. There is freedom that comes from *opening* up and making *your* story known. These struggles are such a big part of our lives, but we hide because we just want to feel normal. By utilizing my platform, I hope to share my story and encourage others to do the same.

Lastly, I want students to *mark* the lives of others by serving where the Office of Accessibility sees fit. Whether it's finding additional note takers or helping someone carry their tray to the table in a dining hall, I want to break the barrier between those with and without accommodations. Every student is unique and brings qualities to this university. Our differences are what *make* us the Auburn Family.

Being considered for Miss Homecoming 2024 has allowed me to dive deeper into the reasons that I love Auburn. The Office of Accessibility can be a gamechanger for students like me who need true help. Students shouldn't see themselves as deficient but rather an integral part of the Auburn Family! Every story can *make a mark* and every story makes Auburn, Auburn.