

# The Women's Center: Feminist Campus Tour Northwestern University

## Deering Library & Deering Meadow

### Deering Library

**Tour Guide:** The impressive structure before you is the Charles Deering Memorial Library. Built in 1933, Deering, as it's more commonly known, was modeled after King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England. In addition to being an architectural marvel, collections within the structure are also a gateway into feminist history.

**Jason Nargis:** “My name is **Jason Nargis**. I'm the Special Collections Librarian for Instruction and Curriculum. I've been working in Special Collections for about 12 years now.”

**Tour Guide:** I wanted to talk to Jason about the Library's investment in women's liberation or second-wave feminist materials.

**Nargis:** “We refer to it as ‘the Femina Collection,’ and that is named after the Biblioteca Femina, which was a library in Italy that was the first documented library that was devoted to works by women. That happened in 1842. And in 1933, a former Northwestern University

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librarian named Theodore Koch went to the World's Fair that happened in Chicago, and there was the International Women's Writer's Conclave.

“And he was very interested in the subject matter and got to know some of the organizers and eventually purchased a number of the books that were part of the library that was produced around this activity. Later on, Northwestern also acquired some of the books that were part of the Woman's Building in 1893, the earlier Chicago World's Fair.

“And so that was the sort of initial purchase of material produced by and about women. A little bit later, in about 1970, was when Northwestern started to focus on the Women's Movement as a collecting area. And there were several librarians who developed relationships with activists and organizations and started to actively collect this material.

“We started acquiring some of the materials, the underground feminist newsletters, [and] also a large collection of what we call the Women's Ephemeral Files, or the WEF files. And that was material from all across the country that documented the sort of ‘on the ground’

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Women's Movement. And that could include handbills, flyers, bumper stickers, sometimes there's, like, handwritten notes for a speech that was happening. So it's a pretty varied collection.”

**Tour Guide:** Part of what makes the collection special for Jason is that the movements that were so prevalent during the period dubbed the “second-wave” [of feminism] grant researchers who come here an opportunity to make connections across struggles for liberation.

**Nargis:** “Northwestern’s collection is especially strong because of the sort of interrelated nature of the counterculture movements at that time. So we have material that also documents the Gay Liberation movement, LGBTQ+ movements in general, the Civil Rights Movement. And there's a lot of overlap and intersectionality between all of those political activities.”

**Tour Guide:** The concept of intersectionality came up again when I asked him about some of his favorite items in the collection.

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**Nargis:** “There is a publication called *Triple Jeopardy*, which was published in the sort of mid- to late sixties, and it's one of the earlier publications that deals with this idea of intersectionality. So it's looking at race and politics, and economic disenfranchisement and sexism. So it was very forward-thinking and that's gotten a lot of use in recent years.”

**Tour Guide:** Jason also suggests looking into the Jenny Knauss Collection, the papers of Karen DeCrow, and the University Archives for information on feminist and intersectional activism on campus.

The best way to gain access to the Femina Collection, University Archives, or other Special Collections materials is to contact a Deering McCormick Special Collections librarian.

### **Deering Meadow**

**Tour Guide:** Even though that is all the time we have for Special Collections, I'm going to ask you to pivot and face Deering Meadow to the west. Try to imagine it filled with

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students, some conservatively dressed and neatly composed, others bell-bottomed with long hair.

The year is 1970 and Northwestern students are on strike to oppose the extension of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and to protest the murder of four student activists by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University. For then-Student Body President **Eva Jefferson**, these two groups of students, “the straights” and “the heavies,” as she called them in the parlance of the day, were seldom in one space. But the urgency of the moment meant coming together to compel the university to take action.

**Eva Jefferson:** “Wow! I've never seen this community together before. Look at the people out here. We've got everybody in the campus out. Every type of person has been working on this: faculty people, the Chancellor showed up, people who've been laying in their apartments, smoking dope for four years. They're out here, you know?”

**Tour Guide: Curtis Lawrence** summarizes the moment for Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences' ‘Flashback: 1970’:

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*[Reading from Lawrence's article]* "On the day after the Kent State shootings, in response to student outrage, Northwestern student leaders convened a forum and decided to join the strike. That same day, Chancellor J. Roscoe Miller issued a statement condemning violence, whether at Kent State, Northwestern, or Southeast Asia. He also asked students to 'show their concern in a manner consistent with the traditions of the academic community.' An emergency session of the University Senate voted to suspend classes for the remainder of the week.

"On May 6, students initiated the strike with a series of demands. They called for the university to make public the holdings in its stock portfolio; to deny students academic credit for participating in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC); to ban Northwestern security guards from carrying firearms; to convert Swift Hall, then being used as an armory, into a community day care center; to offer free legal aid to draft resisters; and to cover the expenses of five Northwestern students who had traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with members of Congress and the Nixon administration.

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Lawrence continues: "The scene grew heated along Sheridan Road, student protesters constructed four coffins and held mock funerals on Deering Meadow, further inflaming passions. They also erected a barricade at the intersection of Sheridan Road and Chicago Avenue."

**Tour Guide:** Looking back on this history, we can see that Jefferson played a pivotal role in maintaining the peace, convincing student protestors not to set fire to Lunt Hall, then home to the ROTC, and later speaking to campus officials about keeping the nearby assembled National Guard from marching on protestors gathered at the stadium.

But Jefferson wasn't there to water down the demands. She demonstrated a keen understanding of how power functions, resisting the narrative that student movements are merely symbolic and that institutions, such as this one, play no part in foreign affairs. As we can here in this next archival clip from WNUR, she held everyone from the Board of Trustees to languishing student protestors accountable.

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**Jefferson:** "The feedback I've been getting from people I've been talking to on campus this weekend is they're bored and they don't have a lot to do, and they're not, they don't exactly know what the strike is about anymore.

"A lot of people booed down the people who work, who are talking about demands, but you have to understand that if the university is really going to show good faith about trying to end the war in Cambodia, there are certain things that the university can do to help in the war, concrete things.

"Everybody I talk to says, 'It's a really hard struggle to try to change Nixon.' So rather than change, change a person that you think you can't change, you knock the structure out from under him. And when you don't have universities, but when you don't have the universities contributing to stock and to companies that support the war, and if all the people in the country get behind it...See, see what people are forgetting is that it's not just an isolated thing at Northwestern. We're trying to spread this movement across the country and make this a people's revolt, if you will, against Nixon.



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“And if Northwestern starts, then other people in the community will see that people who are issuing papers saying that, ‘You know, we're really against the war and we deplore the killings at Kent State’ are not just talking about it and they're willing to do something concrete. And that's why so many of the people here are really adamant about the demands.

“We tried to have rap sessions, talk sessions on the Meadow today, trying to relate our demands to what I'm getting as a general feeling of the student body. The hate for the war in Cambodia, in Southeast Asia, and deploring the killing at Kent State. That's why we, we have the demand about the stock portfolio, I just have one thing to say, it's really been a pretty together strike and a pretty together community for the three or four days that we've been out. But I was really offended when I read today in the *Daily* that the trustees thought that they didn't have enough business tomorrow night for a meeting. To me, it was clear that the feeling of the student body was that we really want to end the war. And one way to do it is to start dealing with our stocks and start dealing with how America is supporting the war.”

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**Tour Guide:** This was just the beginning for Eva, known today as Eva Jefferson Patterson. This one-time participant in the Bursar's Takeover of 1968 and strike leader would debate [Nixon's Vice President] Spiro Agnew on *The David Frost Show* and spend a career in civil rights, getting her law degree, working in legal aid, co-founding the California Civil Rights Coalition, and serving today as the President and Founder of the Equal Justice Society. We celebrate her legacy every January with Eva Jefferson Day during Martin Luther King Jr. Dream Week.

If you're continuing on to the next stop at Norris University Center, please continue south, past the front of Deering Library and turn left (or east) keeping the library to your left and the emerging sculpture garden to your right. Follow the wavy path around the library toward Norris University Center, which is just behind it or to the east, between the library and the lake. Access to Norris requires veering left and up a relatively steep ramp.