

The Women's Center: Feminist Campus Tour Northwestern University

The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (GSRC)

Tour Guide: Welcome to the Norris University Center! Though this building is home to many resources, eateries, and common spaces, for the Feminist Campus Tour, we will be focusing on the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (GSRC) located on the third floor. Whether you choose to go up to the Center or remain downstairs in the lobby, or outside, the audio will continue to play.

To access the GSRC, enter Norris on the first floor on the west side of the building. Take the stairs or the chairlift to the left of the stairs, go right to access the elevator, and take it to the third floor. Exit the elevators to your left and take your first right after the restrooms.

Matt Abtahi: So, the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center is a space on the third floor of the Norris Center. And it's a space that's dedicated to our LGBTQIA+ community at Northwestern, that's managed by Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA). Multicultural Student Affairs has three spaces on campus that they oversee, so, the Black House, the Multicultural Resource Center, and the GSRC.

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Tour Guide: That was **Matt Abtahi**, Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, giving us the quick rundown of what the GSRC is.

But most of my conversation with Matt and MSA Graduate Assistant, **Gabriel Guzmán**, focused on why the space is so important for queer students on this campus.

Gabriel Guzmán: Our students are really the folks who frequent the GSRC and also, like, meaningfully contribute to the community-building, and really like just all the good vibes that's in the GSRC space.

Abtahi: Yeah, the GSRC is nothing without its students that are in it. So again, whether they are lounging, whether they are hanging out, some students will have small gatherings, whether they're studying—I honestly just like peeking in that space—is really the vibe of the GSRC. MSA will sometimes will have professional staff do office hours in that space, but we really are dedicated to making it a very student-centered and student-run space.

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Students have advocated for that space, and so we want to be honoring the ask and the need for a very student-centered queer space for them.

Tour Guide: The GSRC wasn't inevitable. This space for queer students and students who are trans or non-binary came from generations of student activism, activism that is still very much alive today in the ways minoritized populations at this school continue to work together to be seen, respected, and resourced on this campus.

Abtahi: My understanding is that it started with a lot of student activism that was honestly, just in comparison to a lot of our peer institutions, much later than all of the other institutions had created LGBTQ centers.

And so this was in the, I believe it was the early 2000s, that students were [asking for] these types of resources on campus. They were able to identify the space within Norris, but they didn't actually have it fully staffed until a year or two *after* the space came into existence. It was partially, it was, like, staffed by graduate assistants, in a part-time capacity for a while. And students then also advocated for a full-time professional to be dedicated to

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resources and programming, specifically to serving the student population.

Tour Guide: Matt and Gabriel described the GSRC as a place where a great deal of campus activism comes together around issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community, but also, at the intersections of social justice. It is still very much a place to hang out.

Abtahi: I do want to emphasize that students wanted a coffee maker and there's also a coffee maker in that space that they regularly utilize, as well as a candy bowl that we try our hardest to keep replenished. So those are probably the two resources I see students utilizing the absolute most. *(Laughs)*

Tour Guide: But it is also increasingly a place where knowledge and history are held.

Guzmán: One of my favorite things about the GSRC is that our resources are definitely growing in numbers, especially as it pertains to the media archive or, like, the library. And so in that library, you'll find a lot of, like, queer-focused texts that range from like graphic novels, fiction, nonfiction, autobiographies, diverse kinds of texts

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and genres, safe-sex materials, informational pamphlets relating to LGBTQ public health or, like, terminology, some other like Chicago-based resources, that pertain to LGBTQ+ folks.

Abtahi: A lot of our books are either a result of our operational budget, or sometimes donations by faculty, staff. And honestly, some students also donate some books when they're like, "I've read this, I loved it, but I also want someone else to read it."

So, it's almost like this intergenerational exchange of literature and words that have significance to folks. So that's kind of cool.

Tour Guide: Finally, here's Matt and Gabriel, respectively, speaking to why the GSRC is a feminist space.

Abtahi: Yeah, I think patriarchy and misogyny impacts our community every single day. Both interpersonally and in the internal processing that a person often has to do, and, renegotiating the ways in which their gender and the implications of their sexual orientation might have in the spaces that they occupy. So what's beautiful

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about the GSRC is everybody is welcomed there as their most authentic self, that they want to share with the people in that space. And we do that with an extremely intersectional frame and how we hold our programs.

Part of that is, you know, an accountability process that accounts for imperfection, but then also doesn't expect perfection. One in which love is centered and community is cared for. And you know, just, I don't know, a fun place to kind of chill out with people. So, I think that collective mindset allows us to root ourselves in feminist theory, but also feminist practice.

Guzmán: I would also say, as well, like, the GSRC is a feminist space because it affirms, like, the intersectional lived experiences of all types of minoritarian bodies, and also like treasures and forefronts minoritarian frameworks of knowledge, like through different decolonial efforts that involve, like, checking-in with each other, and the politics of this space in of itself, like as Matt mentioned, are very rooted in community care, mutual support, and coalition-building, especially to, like, ensuring the survival of *all* marginalized communities, together. Recognition of the ways that we all experience the world differently, and the ways that we all can show

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up and support each other through listening is another amazing utopic possibility that's riddled in feminist praxis, in queer feminist praxis as well.

I mean, I think in itself, the space is serving, like, as a physical stronghold for students to gather without fear of judgment or disavowal of [their] experience is another thing about the GSRC that welcomes folks that are in their journey with their personhood at any, any parameter, any point or threshold that they are at. Affirms that, as well.

Tour Guide: If you're continuing onto the next stop, that's going to be 619 Clark [Street], or the Bursar's Office. Exit Norris on the west side of the building, following the ramp down to the path that cuts between the Library and the sculpture garden, the same way you came in.

Veer left (or south) to keep Annie May Swift Hall on your right, as you cross this part of campus. You're going to travel past two upcoming tour spots, Kresge Hall, home to Gender & Sexuality Studies, and the Rock, where we'll be talking about the history of Take Back the Night.

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There are two benches near Annie May Swift Hall, if you need a rest, to the west and to the south of the building. As you pass the Rock, veer south (or left) in front of Harris Hall and toward the Arch at the intersection of Sheridan and Chicago. You'll cross Sheridan at the northern most crosswalk with the walk signal. Once across, head south down Chicago Avenue and turn right (or east) onto Clark.