

The Women's Center: Feminist Campus Tour

Northwestern University

Hobart House / The Women's Residential College

Andrene Wright: Whenever anyone talks about Hobart and some traditions that Hobartians have, they love to talk about whenever someone enters the Hobart space, especially if someone is a man, then they have to yell on the floor, "Man on the floor, man on the floor!" before having them go any further than just the front door. And so I love that about them: It really does speak to their politics and it speaks to the traditions that they continue to have, and their humor in some ways. I think it's hilarious.

Tour Guide: Welcome to the Women's Residential College, better known to its residents as Hobart House. The Hobart House is named for Emily Hatfield Hobart, a former student at Northwestern.

Emily died while on a missionary trip to China in 1928, and the building was named in her memory. In 1981, the Women's Residential College moved in. I asked Hobart resident and former Hobart executive president, **Eleanor Ellis**, what continues to draw students to Northwestern's only non-sorority women's residence, some 40 years later.

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Eleanor Ellis: Probably for several other people who choose to live in Hobart, the draw of living in a women and non-binary space is safety, and kind of comfort just knowing...one, because it's so small, like knowing who's in the building, but also knowing that there aren't men around, which for various reasons people might be concerned about, and I know, for instance, for our Muslim residents who wear *hijab*, like, it's very nice for them to have a space where they don't have to worry about running into a man without like being warned ahead of time. So, I think it is just a safe space for people who want that space and need that space on campus.

Tour Guide: Even as the desire for safer spaces has remained constant, and the pull of tradition is strong here, Hobart House residents have also grown in their understanding and inclusivity in recent years.

Ellis: Just because it's called the Women's Residential College doesn't mean that it's restricted to cisgender women. Something we've really been focusing on the last several years is being inclusive to non-binary students and trying to really make this an inclusive and welcoming and safe space for people.

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Tour Guide: Andrene Wright who told us at the top about Hobart's "man on the floor" policy.

Wright: My name is Andrene Wright, I'm a PhD candidate in political science, and I'm also the Assistant Chair for the Hobart Women's Residential College.

Tour Guide: Andrene also wanted us to know that being a Hobartian isn't just about safety and community. It's also about leadership.

Wright: They're self-starters and they're, and they're social justice warriors, if you ask me! *(Laughs)*

Every single one of them are really, are really committed to making the world better. And I know it sounds cliché, but it's true. Every, everything we end up doing is at a cause greater than their own.

Tour Guide: Hobart's reputation for solidarity and service is part of the reason fellows like Andrene are so proud to work with them.

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Wright: That's something that I'm honored to be a part of, to support them in these endeavors.

Tour Guide: But it is also part of what makes the Hobart experience special for the undergraduates who live there.

Ellis: I do really just love Hobart and I'm very grateful for the relationships it's provided me and the opportunities to kind of grow into myself. And I've seen other people be able to have opportunities to lead on our exec board in ways that they might not in other organizations or in other, like, larger dorms.

Tour Guide: And finally I asked Eleanor what makes Hobart a feminist space.

Ellis: I think on one level, Hobart is obviously run by and for women and non-binary folks. So, the exec board, and even people who aren't on exec, we try to really create a welcoming and inclusive space where people, where the residents, like, have the agency to decide, like, what they want the community to look like, what norms we want to have, what events we want to have. So just really giving people a voice. And I think particularly our exec board,

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but also residents, has a lot of space for women of color and queer women, and low-income, first gen college students, to really have that kind of power and that kind of voice that is kind of a bit harder to find in other spaces sometimes.

And so I think, just at every level, Hobart has a lot of space for feminism and a lot of space for just really empowering the people who want to be part of the community.