

The Women's Center: Feminist Campus Tour Northwestern University

The Women's Center

Tour Guide: Hello, and welcome to the Feminist Campus Tour! As the first spot on the tour, the Women's Center begins with a little bit of housekeeping information, so that you have everything that you need to take the tour successfully. So, this is a GPS-guided audio walking tour. If you are taking the full tour, this is your first stop.

The full tour takes just over an hour, and is about 2.8 kilometers or 1.7 miles, and concludes at the Women's Residential College [Hobart House] on Emerson [Street]. All of the stops on the tour have someplace where you can sit, with the exception of the Bursar's Office, which has none, and Deering, which has only a stone ledge.

There are no stairs on the suggested path. Tour takers familiar with campus may choose shorter routes with steps. Full directions and accessibility notes are available for download on the Social Justice Tours website. That's <http://sites.northwestern.edu/socialjusticetours/>. You can also dip in and out of the tour when and wherever you are, by opening the app or scanning the QR code within range of any of the destinations.

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The spots are arranged in the following order: the Women's Center; Deering Library and Meadow; the Gender & Sexuality Resource Center at Norris University Center; the Bursar's Office; and the Women's Residential College.

In Fall of 2021, we will be adding Gender & Sexuality Studies at Kresge Hall and the history of Take Back the Night at the Rock. In Fall of 2021, we will also have a PDF version of the full tour audio available. **Please note that the Women's Center stop includes a mention of domestic violence.**

The path is narrated using cardinal directions. If you're facing the front of the Women's Center with Sheridan Road and the lake to your right, and the rest of Evanston to your left, then you're facing north. Please adhere to traffic signals and signage posted for your safety throughout the tour. I hope you enjoy it!

Njoki Kamau: Yeah, we wouldn't mind going out of business because that means that gender equity would have arrived. But so far it hasn't. So we are still in business.

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Sekile Nzinga: Hello and welcome to Northwestern University's Women's Center. I'm **Sekile Nzinga**, I'm the third Director of the Women's Center, and I have been in the role since 2017. As you just heard from our long-serving Associate Director, **Njoki Kamau**, gender equity is our work, our passion, and our purpose on this campus.

Our center was first established in 1986, and for all of that history has been a feminist space and one of the first spaces for diversity, equity, and inclusion here at Northwestern. We are committed to ending gender oppression, but we also understand that oppression does not happen in isolation. What is more, the building you're looking at is only *one* of our Women's Centers.

We have a Women's Center also on the Chicago campus, in Abbott Hall on Lake Shore Drive [now Jean Baptiste Point du Sable Lake Shore Drive]. So we use our small-but-mighty staff and modest budget to engage, educate, and support people who are subject to gender oppression throughout the broader university: students, faculty and staff who are trans, non-binary, and woman-identified. We not only serve a large constituency of people, but within that, we play a variety of roles.

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Kamau: Our work is to hold the university accountable. So we work a very interesting line! Because on the one hand, I think the expectation is that we'll make the university look good in terms of image, but at the same time, we are also, in order to serve our community of students, staff, and faculty, we also, it's important for us to keep a social justice lens to our work.

Nzinga: The Women's Center began from humble beginnings, when the Program on Women split into the Women's Center and the Women's Studies Program, now Gender & Sexuality Studies. For the past 35 years, the Center has served as a healing space for sexual abuse survivors and a safe house for faculty, staff, and students of color who are navigating marginalization on campus.

The Women's Center is a space where you can be out as a feminist, a queer person, a trans person, a non-binary person, and where you could, where you can be welcomed and supported as a student, as a staff member, a faculty member, an alum, and even a community member.

Many of Northwestern's current gender-responsive policies and initiatives like SafeWalk, SafeRide, the

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statement on academic civility, the Center for Awareness, Response, and Education (CARE), the Association of Northwestern University Women (ANUW), and the Gender & Sexuality Resource Center (GSRC) were incubated or advocated for due to the leadership of the Women's Center staff and its allies across the campus. The Center is a site for feminist intellectual engagement and unapologetic feminist leadership, and has been at the helm of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion well before they ever had a name.

Most importantly, our center is a space where social justice lives and thrives and where our staff lean into our own growth and humanity while supporting others who are doing the same.

Kamau: I happened to be a student, pre-the Women's Center, at Northwestern University. And I do know the difference between, just firsthand, between having a Women's Center and *not* having a Women's Center.

So that is, as a graduate student, as I was at Kellogg, as I was going through...yeah, I was, you know, I was a victim of domestic violence, relationship violence. I always think about how wonderful it would have been to have a

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number to call. To walk across the street, to get help. There was no place. I didn't call, there was no place to call. There was no place. So there I was, as a grad student, you know, very traumatized, and in a very difficult and actually dangerous situation, and I couldn't, I couldn't, I didn't have a place at the university. I didn't even, there was no person I thought I could call. So, so, you know, so then for that reason, I kind of know the pre- and the post-.

Nzinga: The Women's Center has served as a catalyst of change for 35 years here at Northwestern. And in part, because of our work here at Northwestern, we now offer an Office of Equity and the Center for Awareness, Response, and Education (CARE), which is a place of support for survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking, but also a place for building a culture of health, healthy sexuality, and relationships.

With our student-facing partners at CARE, CAPS [Counseling and Psychological Services], CIC [Campus Inclusion & Community], and Gender & Sexuality Studies, we have the talent and expertise we need to implement our intersectional feminist values to advance the university's growth and development.

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Kamau: Reach out to us if you have any question! If we...even, if we don't know, we don't have the answer, we are very good about helping you to find the answer, or trying to find the answer for you. We are very well-networked in the Chicagoland community and, yeah, we could be of help. Or just call us and say hello to us. It makes our day!