

# 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!

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

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**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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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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**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.

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## 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.

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

### The Bursar's Office

**Tour Guide:** The building before you is the Office of Treasury Operations, site of the 1968 student-led civil rights sit-in known as the Bursar's Takeover. The dedicatory plaque from the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association (NUBAA) on the south face of the building reads: "In honor of the more than 100 black students who occupied the Bursar's Office for 38 hours on May 3rd and 4th, 1968. The university's first ever sit-in led to an agreement that resulted in a better existence for Blacks on campus and a better Northwestern."

The placement of this dedication on May 3rd, 2018 was part of university events marking the 50th anniversary of the Bursar's Takeover. Another such event was a speech by former president of FMO (For Members Only) and one of the takeover leaders, **Kathryn Ogletree**. The talk was organized by the Women's Center and the University Archivist for the Black Experience, **Charla Wilson**.

Here's **Kathryn Ogletree**, reflecting on being asked to speak at the intersection of Black and female experience.

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**Ogletree:** “And actually it started when Charla called me. She said, ‘We would like you to come and talk to us about the female perspective of the Takeover,’ and it’s, like, she said that and I said, ‘Okay, I’ll call you back on that.’ It was like I had to get off the phone, okay? Because it was like she had opened up a wound. I wasn’t ready to even talk.”

**Tour Guide:** As you can hear, Kathryn employed wit and grace to address the role that sex and gender played within the struggle for racial equality on campus. And she did so without denying the complexity of the issue or the harm it caused.

**Ogletree:** “The experience of the Takeover, where I was the only Black woman that was part of the negotiating team, and that was because I *had* to be there. I was the president (*laughs*) of FMO, but, it’s interesting, I did always feel that I had the support and backing of the guys, the men in the Black community.

“However, we knew that the culture at the time was that the woman was supposed to be behind the Black man, you know, and push him forward. I was the elected leader of FMO, but I did a lot of secretarial-type things.

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So if I was not, and the people who worked with me were not the people chronicling everything, I'm not sure what would, you know, how the demands would have advanced to the state that we would have had something for Jim Turner to articulate. Now, I'm not trying to put down Jim Turner. He was the best speaker I had ever heard, and he gave form and everything to our demands. We had a good system of camaraderie where whatever your talents were, that's what was used at the time."

**Tour Guide:** In subsequent months, FMO was restructured and Kathryn was encouraged to resign. Here she describes looking back on that moment with her friend and fellow NU and takeover alumna, **Harvette Nelson**.

**Ogletree:** "I was celebrated in, I actually couldn't remember the whole thing. Harvette helped me remember, she said there was some sort of fair that we had, and she said, 'Everybody was giving you all these flowers and everything, and telling you what a great job you had done.' And she said, 'But you know, you didn't look happy.' (*Laughs*) And I said, 'Well, I wasn't happy.' I actually felt it as a funeral. And I honestly, you know, it was like a part of me had died, I had never really talked

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about that. And even though the intentions were good on some level though, because of the context in which it occurred, like I said, it was to move me out of the forefront, and then the guys took over.

“And even when they took over, they still included me in things, but they wanted to make sure that I was not in the head of anything. And like I said, I didn't always, I never really completely processed. I'm processing it now.”

**Tour Guide:** Kathryn Ogletree reminds us that the gender politics of student organizing did not exist in a vacuum. In fact, they necessarily and strategically reflected the expectations these students needed to appeal to in order to bring lasting change.

**Ogletree:** “Now, I was not a speaker like Jim Turner. And aside from that – when you'd look at that eighteen-year-old picture, this was before I had my afro, okay, even - that, I would not carry the authority for the white male administrators to listen to anything I had to say. I mean, this was just being real. I knew it. We don't, we didn't have to sit down and discuss any of that. It's just that that's the way of the world, okay? The white man's

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world, which we were living in at that time, they would not have given me any credibility whatsoever.”

**Tour Guide:** Today, we celebrate the legacy of all the students from the Bursar's Takeover who moved this university forward. Among the gains the takeover achieved are the creation of the Black student union known as Black House, the addition of Black studies courses, and the inclusion of Black student input into admissions and financial aid.

For timeline, full history, photographs, and more please visit the “They Demanded Courageously: The 1968 Northwestern Bursar's Takeover” exhibit via Northwestern libraries.

**Link:** <https://sites.northwestern.edu/bursars1968/>.