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## JMJ Affinity Housing Honors First Black Woman to Graduate from University

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# JMJ Affinity Housing Honors First Black Woman to Graduate from University

January 31, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, ILL. — Josephine Mabel Jackson, the first documented Black woman to graduate from Illinois Wesleyan University, was commemorated in a ceremony naming Kemp Hall's affinity student housing in her honor.

"I think this dedication really nicely describes the legacy of Josephine Mabel Jackson and weaves your own story into this broader history and legacy," said Assistant Professor of Sociology, Courtney Irby.

The JMJ Affinity Housing Community is located in Kemp Hall. Founded in 2020, the JMJ community was started by Jessica Flores '22 and Marlyn Sanchez '21 with the intention of creating a safe space and living community for students of color. In a dedication event organized by the Office of Residential Life last fall, speeches were given by the staff, faculty and students involved in the creation of the community. A portrait of Jackson was also unveiled, displayed above the fireplace on the first floor.

"When we were first trying to decide on an official name for the housing, we received lots of help from ODI (Office of Diversity and Inclusion) with Hannah Mesouani and Veronica Torres Luna who kept in contact with librarian and archivist Meg Miner," said Flores and Sanchez. "That is when we were presented with the idea of naming it after Josephine Mabel Jackson, the first documented woman of color to have graduated from IWU back in 1910. Considering how we are both women of color, we thought this was perfect."

During her time at Wesleyan, Jackson was involved in the YWCA and Adelpic Society – one of the two literary societies on campus in her day. After graduating in 1910, Jackson worked as an educator at several schools and remained an active alumna and donor to the University.

More information about Jackson can be found in [a blog](#) by University Archivist Meg Miner.

"I think this community gives another space on campus for students of color to gather where they can be seen and heard. Since this space was created by students for students, I think it also exemplifies the hard work and dedication of our students here at IWU," said Emma Kirby, Area Director of the Office of Residential Life.

[Affinity housing options](#) are available for students of color and students who identify as LGBTQIA to create safer and more inclusive residential environments. The Rainbow Floor in Pfeiffer Hall provides gender inclusive affinity housing on campus.

Students interested in living in either community, or bidding for new affinity or theme housing on campus, should contact the [Office of Residential Life](#) or the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#).



Josephine Mabel Jackson graduated from IWU in 1910, and was the first documented Black woman to graduate from the University.