February Sisters, a Historical Summary

1966, Nov 3: Student Union Activities (SUA) sponsors an all-male religious forum to discuss the issue of birth control on campus; most doctors at Watkins are Catholic and they give a moral lecture to students before supplying birth control

1967, Spring: another all-male panel on birth control: representative of Planned Parenthood, local gynecologist, physics professor

1968, Fall: Women’s Liberation Front (WLF) formed, Susie Atkins leader

1970

women’s column appears weekly in the UDK

Spring
Conference organized by Emily Taylor (Dean of Women): representatives from the AWS, National Organization of Women (NOW), and the WLF
Planned Parenthood closes due to lack of funds, leaving women students only with Douglas County Health Department for birth control but not examinations (these were given at Watkins)
April 20: Kansas Union burns
May 8: all school convocation (4 days after the Kent State shootings)

June
Louise Wheeler becomes the first female law professor
Emily Taylor, first Assistant Dean

July: Rick Dowdell (black), recent Lawrence High School graduate, rising KU freshman, is shot by a Lawrence police officer; Nick Rice (white), KU undergraduate, is shot by an unknown assailant

Fall:
AAUP forms Group W(omen) to study the status of women on campuses
Associated Women Students (AWS) changes its name to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
SUA holds a Women’s Liberation Forum in Allen Field House: speakers Florence Kennedy and Libby Koontz from the Department of Labor
Nov: Group W & Women’s Equity Action (?) sends a letter to Chancellor Chalmers urging immediate action on the Affirmative Action Program of President Johnson

1971

Fall: only 3 courses in women's studies: Speech 119, Rhetoric of Women’s Rights (male professor); HDFL 123, Women in Contemporary Culture (female professor; course taught since 1960); Liberal Arts & Sciences 48, Topics and Problems in Women

Fall: Molly Laflin, vice president of the student body, supports an initiative for a daycare center

1972

Feb 2 (W), evening
potluck dinner for Robin Moran, feminist, author of Sisterhood is Powerful and Monster, at the United Ministries building behind the Department of Religious Studies
Morgan meets with 20-30 women, asking about conditions of women at KU
complaints about health & childcare, job discrimination, violence against women, need for a women's studies program, female athletic funds
women realized a pattern of "getting blown off" by the administration: "We had done what we were told, such good little girls. We had worked through the system. We had met with all the right people, over and over again. We had been lied to brushed aside for our troubles"
(Christine Leonard)

Morgan speaks at "Minority Opinions Forum"
topics: women's rights (NOW & federally employed women); women's liberation (new left feminism); radical feminism (sexism)
urges women to seize power, take self-defense courses, form communication and anti-rape squads -- take control

reception in the Kansas Union: women from the potluck, additional female staff, faculty and community
midnight: Union closes

Feb 3 (Th), early morning: forum in the Women's Coalition Center: "what do we do about it?," planning the movement, setting up a "phone tree"
Feb 3-4: plans made led by 4 women who knew they weren't part of the FBI/CIA
"There was a group who picked the location and planned how to seize and secure it. There was another group studying the issues and writing the demands. Still another working on strategy -- how to inform the administration, how to get the word to the public, etc. Others were gathering food for forty people for a week. And of course, typing and copying; typing and copying." (Christine Leonard)

Feb 4 (F)
6 pm: "phone tree" tells FS to pack for a week, bring children, meet at various rendezvous spots in Lawrence, & wait for instructions
met at meeting places
phone call to assemble in an alley behind Louisiana & Ohio streets
drove to East Asian Studies Building, 1332 Louisiana (an EAS staff member had given them a key)

"The East Asian Building was peacefully seized at 6:00 p.m. this evening by women and children. There was no damage to persons or property. We wish to make it clear that this building was taken primarily because it was easily accessible, and no insult is meant to either East Asian Studies or the Oriental Language Department. The East Asian Department is moving from this building within the month -- Oriental Languages will move when Wescoe Hall is built. There is adequate room here to house both a Child Care Center and Oriental language Department until that department moves. Our reasons for this action are stated in accompanying leaflets. We will not move until our demands are met. The February Sisters, 2/4/72"

20 women (age 18-40) and 4 children (6 mos-5 years) occupied the building, designating rooms into a nursery, kitchen, sleeping dorm, communication center, meeting room
schedules set up for childcare, clean up, door duty, food preparation
doors chained & Locked, windows closed & latched
only access was up the fire escape and through the 4th floor window -- these were guarded
meeting: christened themselves "the February Sisters," agreed to use only first names
no faculty wives in the building -- these gathered food from sympathetic restaurant workers, and set up an office in the Women's Coalition Center, keeping lines of communication open with walkie-talkies & telephones
meanwhile, other Sisters distributed leaflets around campus with details of the occupation, list of 6 demands, registered letter to Chancellor Larry Chalmers
demands
1. an affirmative action program (AAUP had determined that women professors were making an average of $2064 less than their male counterparts) -- in 1970: 1382 male faculty, 162 female faculty
2. federally-funded day-care center for both staff and students -- women had to pay up to 1/3 of their salary on child care
3. woman Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs & women administrators in both admissions and financial aid offices
4. end to unfair employment practices -- women got paid less than men
5. autonomous department of women's studies -- no women's courses in History, Sociology, Art, or Political Science
   "Women need a Women's Studies program available to them because of the feelings of impotency that women have about themselves in regard to their capabilities to perform in the academic environment. These feelings stem from sex-role stereotypes, i.e., that image of the male as the subject, the actor and doer, that of the female as the other, the passive homemaker and child rearer, the passive non-thinker."
February Sister's Position Paper (University Archives)
6. full health care program for women -- many complaints concerned the lack of neonatal and obstetrics care; female students had to pay a separate charge for university health care as well as look outside for additional health care; pregnant studies got their first 6 months of health care free at Watkins Health Center (run by Dr Raymond Schwegler, who often complained about women's illicit sex), but after that they had to go to outside doctors; university did not issue birth control to students, and even married students found it difficult to obtain contraceptive materials. The demand included a full-time gynecologist/obstetrician, free pap smears, expanded insurance coverage, maternity benefits regardless of marital status, and 50% representation on the KU Health Services Board
these demands had been made earlier at different venues (Health Center, Chancellor's office, student government), but the administration had failed to see any link

men claiming to be from University Buildings & Grounds told them a snake was loose in the building
phone call to Chalmers: he hung up on them, dismissing it as a prank
professor from EAS asked them to leave so he could rescue his research stream of reporters

that evening: phone call saying SenEx (Student Executive Committee) wanted to speak with the negotiation team

Feb 5 (Sa)
1 am: 2 women from inside and 2 women from the WCC chosen to meet with the Chancellor, SenEx, Dean of Women, head of Group W(omen) of AAUP, head of EAS, and the university attorney
admin wanted the women out before morning
FS not leaving until "assurances that actions would be taken to address their issues"

4 am: 2nd group to meet with Faculty Senate and SenEx
5 am: compromise: admin acquiesced to the demands

joint statement from Chancellor & SenEx: they will "speed up the university's dealings with women's issues on campus"

FS put apples on all the desks in EAS building and left -- 13 hours of occupation
50-100 women outside singing, masked the departure of the women’s leaving
100 FS met in United Ministries Building to hear speeches & explanations of the deal made with SenEx

Feb 6 (Su) -- press release: Chalmers: "There is already a plan for a federally funded daycare center, we are waiting for the approval. A committee [has been appointed] to investigate student financial aid. Unfair employment practices would be taken care of by the AAP. AAP was almost ready, after all hadn’t he appoint a head. Health care -- as funds were available."

Feb 7 (M)
FS gather 1750 signatures demanding a child daycare center -- it is not presented since Student Senate, on Mar 2, appropriates $3200 for a daycare center (including $600 for a director’s two-month salary)

7:30 pm: FS appear in the Union to distribute information and answer questions, sponsored by the WCC

Feb 10 (Th)
KU announces the Chancellor’s creation of an affirmative action office: Elizabeth Banks asked to head it, but she had declined

Feb 11 (F)
FS meet with Dr Schwegler to discuss plans for a women's health center
Chancellor: new staff position, filled by a woman, to report the concerns of women directly to the Chancellor

Student Senate denies request for a day-care center

Feb 22 (Tu): Watkins staffs a clinic for women

Mar 2: Student Senate creates daycare center
Mar 3: Affirmative Action Board meets
Aug 21: Hilltop Child Development Center opens in the former Methodist Student Center -- the center was small -- new center built in July 2000
Nov 13: KU releases first draft of an Affirmative Action Plan

1973
Feb: FS publish with a Progress Report
   1. Affirmative Action Program not yet implemented
   2. Hilltop Daycare Center had opened, supported by student activity fees from the Student Senate
   3. Woman still not appointed Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, although a woman had been appointed chair of the Affirmative Action Board and Associate Dean of the College
   4. no comprehensive program to end unfair employment practices
   5. a women's studies program had been started
   6. "substantial progress" had been made on women's health
March 1: KU releases final draft of an Affirmative Action Plan

By end of the 1972
Fall: Women's Studies Program -- "We had to do a lot of fending off criticism, trying to explain what women's studies was or ought to be -- over and over ... once we were linked with the February Sisters, though, some kind of protective mantle fell over our activities," (Janet Sharistanian, first director of Women's Studies)
   1. cross-listing courses (1st course: "Images of Women in British & American Literature")
   2. "Special Major" in women's studies
   3. Board of Regents approves the Women's Studies major (June 17, 1977)

1983: separate women's health clinic established
1992, Feb 28 (F): Robin Morgan returns to KU: "Since February Sisters"

February Sisters (mostly students, but also faculty wives & Lawrence residents)
Banks, Elizabeth (Betty)
Coral, Mary
Francke, Ann
Galas, Judith
Gide, Katherine
Giele, Katherine
Horowitz, Francis
Kay, Marian
Kirby, Channette
Leonard-Smith, Christine
Maher, Mary
Schultz, Elizabeth
Shaffer, Juliet
Shaw, Michael -- and other men who helped in the preparations and drove the women to the occupation site
Stoksted, Marilyn
Wells Bettinger, Sally
Wright, Beatrice

Some Sources
February Sisters Files, Chronological Files, University Archives, Spencer Research Library
Galas, Judith, "Nighttime Takeover Births Women's Programs: A February Sister Looks Back," Women's Studies Program Newsletter 5.4 (University of Kansas, January 1982)
Leonard, Christine, "A Women's Decade of History," University Archives, Spencer Research Library
Scott, Peggy, "Participants Trace Women's Groups’ Past," University Daily Kansan, October 1973, 8