Chapter 7

Nebraska Innovation Studio

ABSTRACT

The Nebraska Innovation Studio (NIS) is a university-based makerspace built on a membership model open to the faculty staff and students from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) and community members at large. The space is located in the newly developed Innovation Campus that sits between the two established university campuses of UNL. Consisting of 17,000 ft² (1580 m²), the space is large and modern with idea strips consisting of TV monitors, peg boards, and white boards running throughout much of the space. NIS has received a number of donations to enable the purchasing of equipment including laser cutters, 3D printers, a long arm quilter, as well as a number of work tables and computers. Overall, the space is very welcoming to new members, with few rules and policies to distract from the making experience. Learning communities are formed through the hard work of NIS staff, which keep track of individual members’ projects and interests and work to ensure they connect with like-minded makers in the space. NIS has impacted the community by opening a shared university space, with the community focused on innovation and entrepreneurship. This chapter explores the Nebraska Innovation Studio.
Nebraska Innovation Studio

A big reason that women do not come to makerspaces is because of mansplaining... It’s generally a male dominated thing. No mansplaining. The best description I’ve heard of it [mansplaining] is explaining something in great detail assuming ignorance of the other party. When you think of your dad explaining to you when you’re a kid about how things work. It really comes off more as parenting. Most people think it’s really uncomfortable or like getting unsolicited advice. — Brett Kennedy

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Nebraska Innovation Studio (NIS) is part of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and is open to the University community (faculty, staff, students) as well as the residents of Nebraska. The space is approximately 17,000 ft² (1580 m²), located on the former Nebraska State Fair grounds. The host building for the space is the former 4-H building that was built in 1931. The former 4-H Building was rededicated in June of 2014 and is now part of a contiguous building complex with a conference center and a business accelerator area. The current reconfiguration of the building started around 2010 and the first phase of Nebraska Innovation Studio was completed in 2015 and opened in October of that year. NIS was conceived as a place that permitted university students the use of real tools (wood, metal, laser cutting) to express their creativity. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has an agreement with NIS to pay for the rental costs of the space and salaries for the two current employees for a period of five years. The equipment was acquired through external sources such as grants, private donors and membership fees.

Brett Kennedy, the Director of Nebraska Innovation Studio at the time of the interview, answered questions about the space and provided a tour. Kennedy, who graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (painting), worked at a small makerspace called MakerBench until his graduation in 2013. He then worked for TechShop Inc. as an instructor and member ambassador for a few years before coming to Nebraska in August of 2016 as the director.

Newly completed, NIS is modern and yet retained a little of the old 4-H building, with curved barned doors and brightly colored concrete columns, holdovers from the days when 4-H projects lined the walls. Entering the space
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