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Innovation Studio readying metal shop, complete redesign



When **Nebraska Innovation Studio** (<https://innovationstudio.unl.edu/nebraska-innovation-studio>) opened in 2015, it was a pre-eminent makerspace unlike anything else in the state — and it's only getting better.

By the end of 2019, NIS will boast a metal shop, larger instant prototyping inventory and larger woodshop, among other improvements.

A new classroom for groups has been completed. NIS Director David Martin said the classroom opened in May and has welcomed school groups, a Solid Works hobby group and the Native Youth Summer Academy.

"I think it will be a popular addition here, for the community and for the university," Martin said.

The metal shop is under construction and will open in late fall. A metal shop was initially part of the plans for NIS, but funding had to be secured. In November 2018, a private donor made it possible to get the shop built. It will have welders, mills, lathes, shears, brakes, tube-benders, media blaster, an iron worker and an English wheel. A CNC plasma cutter and water jet combination machine will be purchased when additional funding is found.

Jerry Reif, shop manager, said the metal shop will likely grow the membership for the studio.

“I’ve had a lot of people inquire about a metal shop, and who’ve said they’d become members once that is up and running,” Reif said.

People who aren’t familiar with metal working but would like to learn, will have access to a virtual welder. The virtual welders are a training tool that takes out the guesswork of learning to weld, Reif said.

“Welding is not an easy process,” Reif said. “It takes years of practice. In the business, it’s often said that you’re a grinder for a long time before you’re a welder because you’re fixing what you did wrong.

“The amount of time and money we’d have to invest in instructors or trainers isn’t doable, but with the virtual welder, we can take that same environment and we can create it virtually. People can practice without welding on metal, using up materials and supplies and burning themselves.”

Besides training aspiring welders, the virtual welders will be used to verify new members can weld, saving materials and resources and keeping safety as a priority in the studio.

The construction of the metal shop coincides with a redesign of the floor plan at NIS. The instant prototyping shop will be moved into the current woodshop, which will move to an area connected to the metal shop. The large quilting machine and new embroidery machine will be housed in the current prototyping room.

The new layout will allow additional laser cutters, 3-D printers and other equipment to be purchased as the membership has continued to grow. Martin said they are open to suggestions for other equipment that would be a good addition to the studio.

“We got a lot of requests for an embroidery machine, which we purchased recently, and we’re always listening to our makers,” Martin said. “If there’s a demand for a new piece of equipment, and we have the funds to get it, we will try to get it.”

Not a maker? Martin said the studio is now offering a **“Request a maker”** (http://innovationstudio-manager.unl.edu/maker_request) service, where a patron can request a project on the NIS webpage and be matched with a maker.

“I think that opens Nebraska Innovation Studio up to everyone, regardless of skill level,” Martin said. “If you have an idea, we can find the person with the skills to get the project done.”

by **Deann Gayman | University Communication** (<https://news.unl.edu/written-by/deann-gayman-university-communication/>)

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