

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY - RURAL HEALTH EDUCATION BUILDING

Kearney, Nebraska



The University of Nebraska at Kearney's new Rural Health Education Building was developed to support the University's vision of expanding healthcare education programs and preparing the next generation of rural medical professionals. As part of the new 110,000-square-foot academic facility, Rippe Associates designed a multi-station retail café and second-floor micro market that provide students, faculty, and staff with convenient, healthy dining options throughout the day. Recognizing that healthcare students spend much of their time within the building and have limited access to other campus dining venues, the foodservice program was intentionally designed to offer quick, customizable meals in a welcoming environment that encourages students to relax, recharge, and connect between classes.

Rippe Associates joined the project after the architect identified the need for a more integrated foodservice design approach. Drawing on a longstanding relationship with RDG Planning & Design, Rippe collaborated closely with the University, Sodexo Campus Services, and the design team to develop a highly efficient operation within a compact footprint.

Details

Opening Date: May 2026

Equipment Cost: \$820,000

Total Size: 2,735 SF

Scope

Foodservice planning and design for a new multi-station retail café and 24-hour self-service micro market. The project features an all-electric kitchen, open customer-facing production, grab-and-go service, and independent back-of-house support designed to meet the needs of healthcare students and faculty.

The café was designed to function independently from the University's primary dining facilities, incorporating its own cold and dry storage, warewashing, and an all-electric kitchen. An open kitchen concept maximizes valuable square footage while enhancing visibility, customer engagement, and circulation throughout the serving area.

Despite the limited back-of-house space, the design successfully integrates all essential production and support functions while creating an inviting customer experience. An action cooking station featuring a customer-facing induction fire-and-ice sauté range allows chefs to prepare fresh, customizable entrées in full view of guests, reinforcing menu freshness and culinary theater. Thoughtful details—including frosted glass sneeze guards, concealed equipment, and integrated exhaust hood finishes—maintain clean sightlines and elevate the overall dining environment. Additional conveniences such as grab-and-go offerings, online ordering with dedicated pickup space, and a 24-hour self-checkout micro market on the building's second floor ensure students have access to nutritious meals whenever their schedules demand.

Operational efficiency and sustainability were fundamental to the design. The production areas were carefully organized to maximize workflow within a constrained footprint while supporting high-quality food preparation. The all-electric kitchen utilizes Energy Star® certified equipment and low-flow plumbing fixtures, aligning with the University's sustainability goals while reducing energy consumption. Upon completion, the client praised the collaborative design process and the cohesive integration of the café and micro market into the building's common spaces. The result is a flexible, future-focused foodservice program that enhances the student experience while supporting the University's continued investment in rural healthcare education.

