



# News Release

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## **Ridgewater Automotive Service Technology program ranked top public program in nation**

WILLMAR, MN – Ridgewater College has earned top national honors as the best public college for students to pursue an auto mechanic certificate like a non-degree option like a diploma.

The Washington Monthly recently ranked Ridgewater and 95 other public and private institutions in its annual College Guide and Rankings. Past rankings by the organization have considered two-year associate degrees at community colleges, but this is the first ranking, according to the magazine, that reviewed non-degree options like certificates and diplomas.

Students can earn both options in Ridgewater's Automotive Service Technology program – a 65-degree diploma or a 72-credit associate of applied science degrees. Learn more about the program at [www.ridgewater.edu/autotech](http://www.ridgewater.edu/autotech).

As a way of rating colleges based on what they are doing for the country, the Washington Monthly based its ranking on the U.S. Department of Education gainful employment database. The primary criteria used was median earnings of students three years after graduation. Other related factors included median debt-to-earnings ratios, annual debt payments, estimated total debt, and outcome under gainful employment.

A review of the ranking considerations revealed that median annual earnings for Ridgewater graduates after three years in the industry were \$36,460, with the estimated total college debt approximately \$11,868. That's nearly half the debt a student would incur when attending the private college ranked first when reviewing both public and private options.

For Ridgewater graduates, just 4.16% of their earnings go to annual debt payments, compared to 7.74% for the top private option. When including private training options in the ranking, Ridgewater ranked second in the nation among the 96 rankings, just behind Dunwoody College of Technology in Minnesota.

"The Ridgewater Automotive Service Technology program is excited to be recognized as a top auto mechanic program in the nation," said instructor Jon Friton. "The recognition ultimately belongs to our graduates who have worked hard to become great technicians. We pride ourselves in providing a real-world learning experience and are always working to improve our program."

Fellow instructor Kevin Larison added, "We find it refreshing that Career and Technical Education is gaining a stage at the national level. The countless teachers in all vocational areas are the unsung heroes of working-class America!"

“Ridgewater College is proud of our Automotive Service Technology program and our students,” said Mike Kutzke, dean of technical programs. “Our instructors pride themselves on their dedication and commitment to our program, the automotive mechanics profession and providing students with personal and professional growth opportunities.”

For more information, go to [www.washingtonmonthly.com](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com) and search for “2018 college vocational rankings.”

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Ridgewater College is a community and technical college with campuses in the central Minnesota communities of Willmar and Hutchinson. The college serves more than 5,000 students through its nearly 100 academic programs and more than 68,000 training hours for individuals and businesses through customized training and continuing education. The college is a member of Minnesota State and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

*Minnesota State includes 30 community and technical colleges and 7 state universities serving approximately 400,000 students. It is the fourth-largest system of two-year colleges and four-year universities in the United States.*

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