



News Release

For Immediate Release – 5/18/2020
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Ridgewater earns National Reaccreditation for Concurrent Enrollment Program

Process affirms Excellence in College Courses Taught by High School Instructors

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HUTCHINSON and WILLMAR, MN - The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) Accreditation Commission recently granted accreditation to Ridgewater College and 18 other concurrent enrollment programs at colleges and universities nationwide.

Concurrent enrollment, also known as College in the Schools (CIS), is where Ridgewater College collaborates with high schools across Minnesota to offer college-level classes taught by qualified high school instructors in high school classrooms. Students receive both high school and college credit at the same time for the courses.

For the Ridgewater partnership, it involves about 230 students from about 10 schools each year, according to Kelley McClure Mork, Ridgewater's College in the Schools academic advisor. Some schools are as close as Willmar and Hutchinson, while others are as far away as Eveleth.

"These instructors are mentored by our faculty who ensure that courses taught at our partner high schools are as rigorous as those taught on campus," McClure Mork explained. "Because we hold College in the Schools students to the same standards and expectations as traditional Ridgewater College students, our College in the Schools graduates have been able to test into higher level college courses, save time and money toward their degree options, and have gained the confidence and skills needed to succeed in their college level course work."

This round of accreditations brings the total number of accredited programs across the country to 116, spanning 24 states.

As the nation's only accrediting body for these unique and impactful educational partnerships, NACEP's standards serve as the model criteria for ensuring consistency in faculty, course content, student outcomes, and support, according to NACEP. Receiving NACEP accreditation means an institution has met the nation's most rigorous standards in development, management, and evaluation across multiple, multi-faceted concurrent enrollment program areas.

“NACEP accreditation demonstrates a commitment to academic integrity and the delivery of an authentic college experience to the high school student and is a goal that every concurrent enrollment program should aspire to and work towards,” said NACEP Executive Director, Amy Williams. The programs that receive accreditation meet established best practices in curriculum, faculty, students, assessment, partnership, and evaluation.

To earn accreditation or reaccreditation, programs conduct a self-study, document how their programs adhere to NACEP’s 16 standards, and undergo a rigorous peer-review process conducted by a team of representatives from NACEP-accredited programs as well as the NACEP Accreditation Commission. According to McClure Mork, it’s about an 18-month process. Accreditation is then valid for five years and reaccreditation is good for seven years.

“Ridgewater College values the close working relationships we have with our partner schools and educators to provide this excellent educational option to students,” said Mike Kutzke, Ridgewater Vice President of Student Success. “It is reassuring to know that in 2019, 85% of surveyed students in the Ridgewater partnership told us that their College in the Schools experience helped them have better time management skills, more confidence in their ability to succeed in college courses, more realistic expectations about college, and be better prepared academically for college.”

Ridgewater College has offered CIS since 2006 and has been accredited since 2013. It is among 24 Minnesota accredited colleges. Many colleges are not yet accredited, explained McClure Mork, but in Minnesota, the Legislature had directed all CIS programs to be NACEP-accredited by May 2021.

“Ridgewater College is committed to preparing students for success,” Kutzke said.

“Ensuring program, and ultimately student success, requires strong partnerships between secondary and postsecondary education and a mutual commitment to quality in all aspects of the program,” said NACEP Executive Director, Amy Williams. Concurrent enrollment increases student’s college aspirations, engagement, and success thus concurrent enrollment programs hold tremendous potential for increasing college completion and addressing national attainment gaps. The positive benefits of dual and concurrent enrollment on college access and degree attainment were validated by the Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) in a review of the experimental and quasi-experimental literature.

To learn more about the College in the School program and opportunities at Ridgewater, go to www.ridgewater.edu/cis.

To learn more about NACEP and the accreditation, go to <http://www.nacep.org/nacep-accredited-programs/>.
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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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