Ridgewater receives $1.37 million grant to help disadvantaged students succeed

HUTCHINSON and WILLMAR, MN – Ridgewater College students gained another boost for success recently when the U.S. Department of Education extended a five-year Federal TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) grant of $1,370,370 to help more students succeed in college and graduate.

For 15 years, the TRIO SSS grant helped Ridgewater students who are low income, first generation (those whose parents do not have a four-year college degree) and students with disabilities. Annually, the Ridgewater TRIO team helps approximately 175 students with everything from assistance in choosing courses and completing scholarship and financial aid FAFSA applications to career and college mentoring, transfer planning, and other forms of assistance.

“We are very excited to continue providing needed services on both the Hutchinson and Willmar campuses of Ridgewater College for another five years,” said Thomas Tie, Ridgewater director of TRIO-SSS. “These services enhance academic success and increase the likelihood that students will graduate or transfer with confidence and with the lowest possible debt.”

TRIO support helps students complete their AA, AS, or AAS degrees at Ridgewater and for several, plan next steps for bachelor’s degrees.

“Four-year transfer assistance is one of the more important services we offer at Ridgewater,” Tie explained. “As a community college, Ridgewater is a great start for many four-year degree seekers. Tuition is more affordable and the transition from high school to college might feel less scary or daunting because of its smaller size. When we take students on four-year college tours, we try to have students meet with someone in their chosen major to make a connection and to learn more about requirements to get into the major.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the need for TRIO and Student Support Services. With physical university tours on hold, support has been provided virtually and more students are needing support as they navigate the delivery of courses. Fortunately, this grant is 3.5 percent greater than the last award.
Tie is proud of the track record for Ridgewater TRIO-SSS students. For the 2018-2019 academic year, the most recent data available, 87 percent of TRIO participants returned for Fall 2019 or graduated and 85 percent of TRIO participants remained in good academic standing with the college.

SSS is one of the eight federal TRIO programs authorized by the Higher Education Act to help college students succeed. It recognizes that students whose parents do not have a college degree have more difficulties navigating the complexity of decisions that college requires for success; it bolsters students from low-income families who have not had the academic opportunities that their college peers have had, and helps students with disabilities remove obstacles preventing them from thriving academically.

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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 340,000 students. It is the third largest system of two-year colleges and four-year universities in the United States.*

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