The mission of the Occupational Skills Program is to prepare students for competitive entry-level employment in the community.

The Occupational Skills Program (OSP) at Ridgewater continues to meet the needs of students with disabilities and employers in central and southwest Minnesota. Employability skills are taught through internships (OSP 1750 and OSP 1850) and classes such as Job Keeping Skills (OSP 1000), Career Assessment (OSP 1200), SOT Seminar (OSP 1700), Job Seeking skills (OSP 1100), and Applied Job Search (OSP 1900). Elective classes focus on independent living skills. Classes such as OSP 1300 Consumer Skills teach students how to manage their money and how to use savings, checking and debit cards. Community and Leisure (OSP 1390) teaches students how to use community resources as well as make plans and have a social life outside of school and work.

This year OSP has added two general studies courses. These courses are GSWS 1452 First Aid/Safety and GSIS 1502 Human Relations. Courses are taken with students from other technical programs. They are a requirement for students in the diploma program. Both classes offer skills needed by students not only in their jobs, but also in their personal lives.

OSP continues to offer internships in a variety of settings. Under the mentorship of Tim Laffen, Internship Coordinator, students choose from over 80 different sites in the Willmar area. Students are encouraged to choose a site that interests them and matches their skill set. Students are at the following sites for fall semester:

- Stay-N-Play Childcare – Child Care Assistant
- Bethesda Pleasantview Nursing Home – Activities Assistant (2 students)
- Kandiyohi County YMCA – Custodian
- LuLu Beans Coffee Shop – Kitchen Assistant
- Workstudy at Ridgewater – Office Assistant
- Running’s Farm & Fleet – Stock Person
- McMillan’s Restaurant – Kitchen Assistant
- Tires Plus Auto Shop – Shop Assistant
- Kennedy Elementary School – Classroom Aide
- Kandiyohi County Historical Society – Office Assistant
- Taher Catering – Kitchen Assistant
- Auto Value Parts Store – Parts Assistant
- Cash Wise Foods – Stock Person

This fall, students went to Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center where they played problem solving games, rock climbed and did the “flying squirrel” (see photo at left). All of the activities reinforced skills that were being taught in the classroom. Skills worked on included listening, following directions, problem solving, perseverance, team work, communication, trust, respect, etc.

Students also participated in a Job Fair at the Conference Center, a Transition Fair and Student Success Day (both at Ridgewater). Our Human Relations class also went out to eat at an East African restaurant in downtown Willmar. At the Bihi Restaurant students enjoyed different foods and had the opportunity to experience another culture through a question and answer session with the owner of the restaurant.
student quotes
Tell me something good about your first week at Ridgewater:

- I learned how to ride the bus by myself for a whole week.
- I met new people.
- The food at the cafeteria is decent.
- I know where my classes are.
- Some clubs look pretty interesting to look into.
- I forged a relationship with Mello Yello.
- My gramps paid for my tuition.
- I made a lot of new friends.
- I have learned my way around a little bit better.
- I started my internship at Bethesda Pleasantview.
- I started my internship.
- Last week I learned how to use my email.
- I got to eat lunch with my friends and talk.
- I got my homework done.
- I went shopping at the college store.
- I get my homework in on time.
- I was on time every day for school.
- I am making use of my time at college.
- My classes are fun.
- My classmates are the best friends I could ever have in my class.
- I got to go to a Ridgewater college football game and we won.
- I got to hang out with my friends.
- I moved away from my mom and dad.
- I like coming to Ridgewater.

check and connect
Check & Connect is a free service for students with intellectual disabilities. C&C is a student engagement intervention model to promote students’ success with school, reduce dropout rates, and increase school completion which originated from a partnership of researchers, practitioners, parents, and students led by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. C&C is a grant funded program.

What’s happening 2014-2015? Jay Morrison is now the Disability Services Coordinator and Sarah Dimond is the NEW C&C Coach. Sarah graduated from St. Cloud State University with her Master of Science in K-12 School Counseling and Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. She worked as a School Counselor in the Osseo School District with junior high and elementary students.

C&C is a grant funded five year program and is in its 5th and final year. We are looking at ways to fund and continue the program for the future, but cannot say with absolute certainty that C&C will be in place next year. We are looking for personal stories about how C&C has made a difference in your life. Please contact Sarah Dimond with any stories, thoughts, or successes that C&C has contributed to.

There are many activities for Check & Connect. We have a weekly Study Island night where students may stay after class to get additional help with classes, homework, and check things off their “to do” lists. Sarah has set up different times for exercise activities, such as walks around the campus border, yoga, and group fitness in the campus fitness center. We were also part of a Transition Day Fair on November 7th to help ease students’ fears about college and help them feel more comfortable with attending college and the Ridgewater Campus.

For more information about Check and Connect, please contact:
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