mission statement

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 is finishing up its 25th year. The program continues with the support of Ridgewater administration, local businesses, rehabilitative services, K-12 special education teachers, former students and their parents, and an active advisory board. Classes focus on preparing students for employment and independent living. Methods of teaching include lecture, individual tutoring, visual, auditory and hands on projects. Students work individually and in small groups. Emphasis is on decision making, problem solving and interpersonal relations. This year I-pads were introduced and used in classes. And for the second straight year, a local theatre instructor (Nikki Erickson) came in once a week to teach interpersonal and communication skills through group activities.

Change continues to happen as we move towards a 32 credit diploma and a 28 credit certificate program next year. In the diploma program, students will have four credits of required general studies classes with non-disabled peers. Other general study classes will also be available as electives for students to take on an individual basis. (See reverse for course plans.)

internships

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. Sites are as varied as child care, customer service, shop assistant, food service, custodial, computers, library assistant, retail sales, etc. Businesses within the Willmar area have been supportive of the program for 25 years and have continued to supply students with meaningful internships.

iPad training

As part of our OSP Transition to Independent Living course, iPads were introduced. Students were taught basic operations of an I-pad along with the introduction of apps such as first aid, weather, maps, keynote, camera, and slideshow just to name a few. Students have used the iPads in other classes such as Job Seeking by practicing interviewing. Groups of three students were formed with one of the students being the interviewer, one the interviewee, and the third student videotaping with the iPad. Students then had a chance to critique themselves and others in an interview situation.

club activities

Occupational Skills has their own student club led by this year’s president, Cory Frank. Activities planned by the club were both educational and fun. Some of the activities included job fairs, community service fair, a trip to the state capitol, bowling, Ridgewater plays, movies, parties, eating out at local restaurants, volunteering in the community and fundraising.
Check and Connect

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

What’s new with Check & Connect at Ridgewater College? C & C purchased iPads for student use in OSP and also adaptive software that is available for student use in the Academic Support Center. Along with OSP, PRISM, Student Life, and Multicultural Club, C & C helped sponsor a Pillsbury Theatre Production of Breaking Ice that was performed for students and Ridgewater staff. The performance broke down barriers of misunderstanding and focused on cultural and disability awareness and how diversity impacts peoples’ experiences.

We are also planning on hosting the Transition to College Orientation Program (TCOP) again this fall. The three day orientation program helps ease transition fears of students with intellectual disabilities as students get to learn how to use public transportation, tour Willmar, get an extensive tour of the college, purchase text books, learn how to use Ridgewater computers, check e-mail, use Desire to Learn, E-Services, and meet other new students.

For more information contact Jay Morrison, Disability Service Coordinator, by email or phone at jay.morrison@ridgewater.edu or 320-222-8040.

student quotes

What is my favorite memory of OSP?

“My favorite memory is all the friends I have made. Also I have been able to go through a lot of new experiences and had my teachers to help me through it.” 

Elizabeth – Class of 2014

“My favorite memory was my internship working with kids at a daycare.”

Victoria – Class of 2014

“My favorite memory is all of the field trips and class activities.”

Samantha – Class of 2014

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