



# News Release

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## **Photography Program to Go Fully Online at Ridgewater**

WILLMAR and HUTCHINSON, MN – Beginning this fall, Ridgewater's Professional Photography program will be available fully online.

"Even before the pandemic, people have been requesting for a while that we move our program more to an online format," explained Wade McDonald, one of Ridgewater's Professional Photography instructors. "We feel like this is the right move at the right time."

"This expansion gives the student more flexibility by providing them more options," said Amy Pawelk, Photography's second instructor. "Students will be able to do the coursework when it works with their schedule. Plus, all the equipment needed to complete the coursework can be checked out to students as needed, allowing them to work from home. If they prefer hands-on lab time with instructors and other students present, they can also come to campus."

Options available will still include the 60-credit Associate of Applied Science degree, the 64-credit diploma, and the fairly new 29-credit certificate. But to help ensure student success with the more hands-on applications, the new format will also include the optional, weekly, face-to-face lab experiences with instructors at both Willmar and Hutchinson campuses, not just Willmar as has been in the past. Fall and spring starts will be available.

All required courses that focus on everything from photography concepts, editing software and portrait and commercial photography will be online, along with most electives. The elective Real Estate Photography course will require a few visits to campus at this time.

Because faculty know that students can't afford to own all the equipment they'll need, plans are to expand the equipment loan program. "Our equipment checkout program is a huge asset to our students' education," McDonald explained. With the new online experience, local students will be allowed to check out and pick up more equipment while more distant student can request to have it shipped. This might include lights, stands, backgrounds, and more. "The more time the students have with the equipment the better prepared they are for the industry."

Two more changes within the Photography program made to better serve students include removing course pre-requisites and offering the Photography Certificate somewhat like a minor to complement other areas of study. "A solid understanding of photography concepts can be a valuable asset for people studying or currently working in marketing, communications, business and more," Pawelk said.

With Photography going online and instructors now expanding their optional lab experience to the Hutchinson campus, students in the related Photo and Design program will soon benefit as well.

About a year ago, Ridgewater Professional Photography and Multimedia Design Technology (MMDT) faculty began the combined program called Photo and Design. The collaborative goal was to offer students a broader skill set to confidently produce social media content, advertising, and more.

"It's really the best of both worlds!" McDonald said. "Our students will be more than a photographer and more than a designer. They'll be able to compete in the employment market by having developed a desirable skillset for companies hiring in the visual communications career field."

"We are excited to integrate our photography and design programs on the Hutchinson Campus," said Matt Feuerborn, Ridgewater dean of technical programs. "The benefits of this approach will help us better meet the needs of our students and the entire Ridgewater College service area."

Ridgewater's Amy Maher is the Multimedia Design Technology instructor who teaches many of the graphic design classes within the Photo and Design program. Her classes are already fully online. "It will indeed be an asset to offer a photography lab in Hutchinson. Students will now have the opportunity to meet with the Professional Photography instructors as well as work in the studio space, explore props and experience face-to-face equipment application."

In addition, Maher will continue to offer her own one-on-one lab time and students will also continue to have access to the fairly new collaboration creativity lab called CreateSpace. It gives students from many programs a special place to work together to think outside the box.

For more information about the Professional Photography or Photo and Design programs, go to [www.ridgewater.edu/artanddesign](http://www.ridgewater.edu/artanddesign). To meet faculty and ask questions, check out the upcoming Photo and Design Information Sessions set for April 8 at 5:30 p.m. and May 14 at 9:00 a.m.

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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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