

College in the Schools

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Updated Summer 2026



RIDGEWATER
COLLEGE

a community and technical college





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Welcome to **College in the Schools**

This manual is written for you—the student--and contains the information that you need to know as a high school student taking a College in the Schools course at Ridgewater College

We hope that this manual will prepare you for what it's like to be a student in one of our courses, and how to navigate your way through the processes involved in being a College in the Schools student.

If at any time you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your teacher, guidance counselor, or Ridgewater College.

What's CIS?

Through College in the Schools (CIS), qualified students can earn college credit prior to high school graduation. It gives you a head start on your college career before you even leave high school. The College in the School option falls under the Post-Secondary Education Option (PSEO) mandated by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

1

Who teaches CIS Courses?

Your own high school instructors teach you the college courses during your normal school day, at your high school. You don't need to come to the Ridgewater College campus to take the class.

2

How are teachers qualified?

Instructors meet the same credentialing requirements as faculty teaching on the Ridgewater College campus. Instructors are also paired with a Ridgewater College faculty member, who teaches the same course on campus, as their "mentor". During the year, your instructor and their mentor meet regularly to ensure quality and course rigor.

3

Are the classes hard?

Taking CIS courses will expose you to college-level course work, college-level processes, college-level academic rigor, and college-level challenges. It'll give you a preview of what lies ahead for you in college. If you fall behind or need extra help, we're here to guide you along the way!

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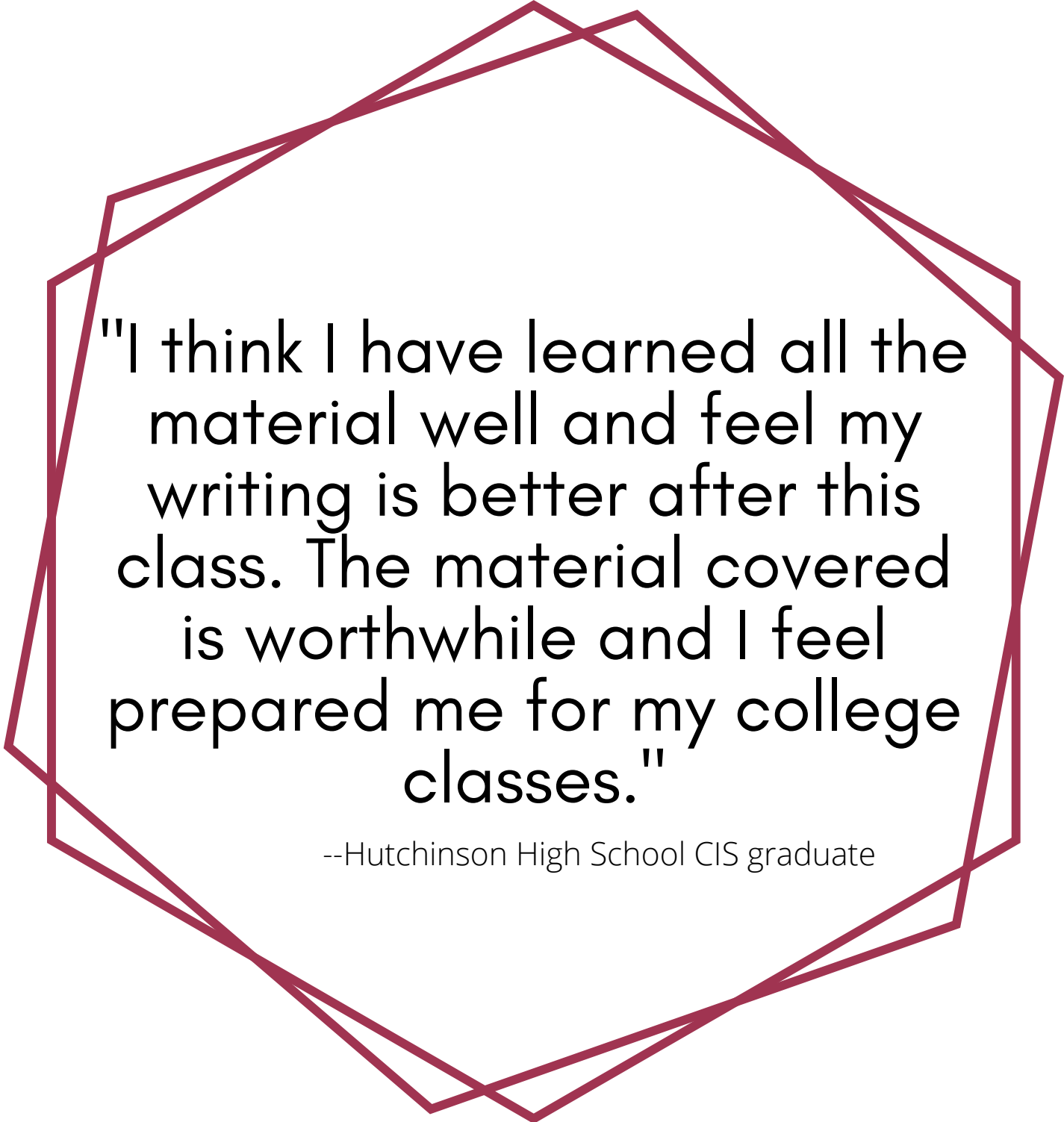
How much does it cost?

The cost for these courses is covered by your high school. Books are also provided by the high school. Any personal needs (notebooks, pens, etc) are the responsibility of the student.

5

What are the benefits?

Taking college-level courses while in high school may help develop your self-confidence, a trait that will serve you well as you move on from high school. CIS graduates have also told us they have better study skills and have felt better prepared when they went onto college after high school.



"I think I have learned all the material well and feel my writing is better after this class. The material covered is worthwhile and I feel prepared me for my college classes."

--Hutchinson High School CIS graduate

Application Information

If you have interest in taking a College in the Schools course, speak to both the teacher who will be teaching the course, as well as your high school guidance counselor/administrator. They will be able to tell you more about the course, if there is space available, and provide you with information on applying.

Sophomores, juniors, and seniors are welcome to take CIS classes as long as they meet admissions requirements. The admissions office will review applications and only admit and enroll students who meet the admissions requirements.



To apply, students must:

1

Complete the Application

Applications are completed online through the Ridgewater College website with the help of their school counselor.

Students who are current (or past) PSEO participants through Ridgewater College can often use the PSEO application we already have on file. However, students may need to submit additional documentation.

2

Include a Transcript

Transcripts need to:

- Include cumulative GPA **OR** class rank
- Be from the current school year

3

Prerequisites for English Comp

Students who are planning to take English Comp I must meet the prerequisite of placing into college level reading & writing.

Students who have a 2.6 GPA or higher automatically meet the prerequisite.

Students below a 2.6 GPA will need to provide ACT/SAT scores or take the Accuplacer Reading assessment.

Admissions Criteria

for courses in liberal arts

Seniors

- 2.5 GPA or class rank in the upper 1/2 **and**
- Place into college level reading & writing if taking English Comp I*

Juniors

- 3.0 GPA or class rank in the upper 1/3 **and**
- Place into college level reading & writing if taking English Comp I

Sophomores

- 3.0 GPA or class rank in the upper 10% **and**
- Place into college level reading & writing if taking English Comp I

**If a student's GPA is below a 2.6 and ACT/SAT scores are not available, the student will need to take the Accuplacer reading assessment.*

Common Admissions Questions

1

What if I don't get in?

Students can appeal the decision and need to work with their guidance counselor to initiate this process.

2

What if I change my mind?

You have until the 10th business day of the course to drop without any penalty. After that date, you can still withdraw, but it will put a "W" on your transcript. More information on "W" marks can be found on page 6

3

Can I also do PSEO?

You bet! We use the same admissions criteria as the PSEO program. You will need to let your high school know of your plans by May 30th as additional documentation will be required. See your guidance counselor for more details.

Admissions Criteria

for courses in technical programs

Seniors

2.4 GPA or higher

Juniors

2.4 GPA or higher

Sophomores

850 or higher on the 8th grade
MCA reading assessment*

**If the student does not have an MCA score, they may take Accuplacer reading assessment.*

Common Admissions Questions (con't)

4

What if I don't get in
for technical courses?

Juniors & seniors can appeal the decision and need to work with their guidance counselor to initiate this process.

Sophomores only taking technical courses who don't have qualifying MCA scores cannot appeal per MDE guidelines. The student can reapply in their junior year.

5

What if I want to take
both liberal arts &
technical Classes

If a student wants to take both liberal arts and technical courses, the student must meet the admissions requirements for liberal arts. If the student meets liberal arts admission requirements, they are also allowed to take technical courses.

If a student does not meet admissions criteria for liberal arts, they can explore admission to technical courses only.

Accuplacer Assessment

As outlined under *Admissions Criteria*, students who want to take English Composition I need to meet the prerequisite of placing into college level reading and writing. This can be achieved in a few different ways:

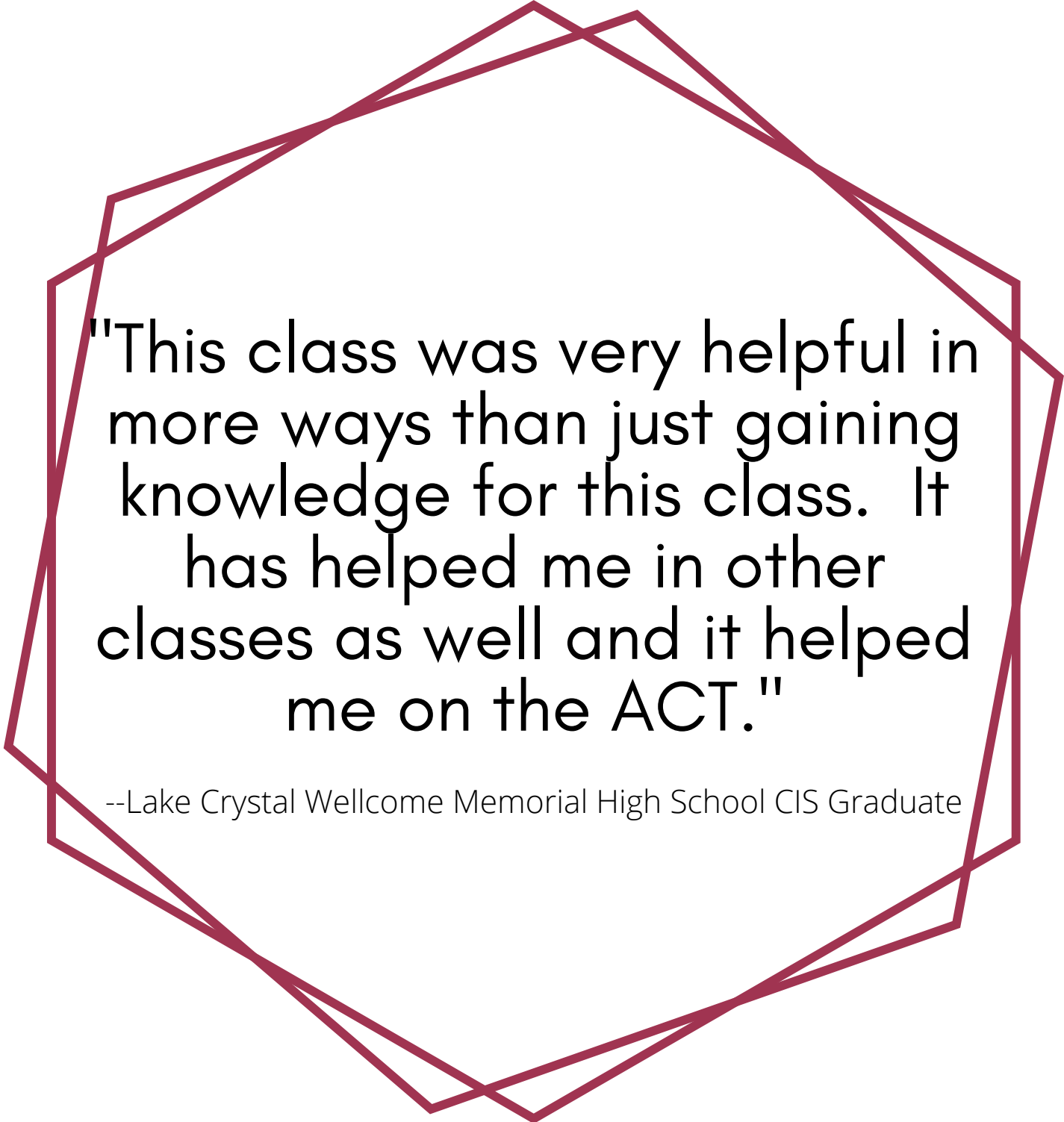
GPA: Students who have a 2.6 cumulative GPA (or higher) at the time of application are automatically placed into college level reading and writing, meeting the prerequisite.

ACT/SAT SCORES: Students who do not have a 2.6 GPA at the time of application, but have qualifying ACT/SAT scores, will be placed into college level reading and writing, meeting the prerequisite.

ACCUPLACER: Students who do not have a 2.6 GPA, and do not have qualifying ACT/SAT scores, will be notified to make arrangements to take the Accuplacer reading assessment. The math assessment is only required for courses that have a math placement requirement. Your student will be notified if they also need to take math.

Scheduling your Accuplacer Assessment before your application is processed can result in testing fees. Please wait to be notified before scheduling your assessment time.

A photo ID is required in order to take the exam. If you do not have a photo ID, please contact Student Services at 320-222-5971



"This class was very helpful in more ways than just gaining knowledge for this class. It has helped me in other classes as well and it helped me on the ACT."

--Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial High School CIS Graduate

Important Course Information



From registration, to pre-requisites, to understanding what to expect--College in the Schools courses aren't your average high school course. Expectations are higher, course content is more challenging, and more time is spent outside of class getting your work completed.

By taking a CIS course, you are not only a high school student, but a Ridgewater

College student. You are held to the same policies and expectations as those students who take classes on our campus. ***It is your responsibility to know and understand these policies and expectations.***

To view Student Rights and Responsibilities, including the Ridgewater College Student Handbook, visit our website at ridgewater.edu/about/student-rights-responsibilities

Registration into the Class

We take care of that for you once you meet the admissions requirements! If you have changed your mind about participating, speak to your guidance counselor who will then contact Ridgewater.

Course Load

Taking a college course can be challenging, and balancing everything on your plate (such as athletics, clubs, work, social life, family life, etc) is important. Therefore, before signing up for a CIS class, we encourage students to meet with their guidance counselor to talk about the class requirements. Students are allowed to take a full-time course load between CIS and PSEO courses--but just because you can doesn't mean you should. Students are also welcome to schedule an appointment with Ridgewater College advisors and counselors to discuss any concerns.

Be Mindful of Pre-Requisites

Courses that have prerequisites require you to complete the first course in the sequence with "C" or higher (unless otherwise noted). We notify students in advance of this requirement and our registration system will not allow you to register unless you meet that minimum grade. If you do not meet the grade requirement, you'll need to find a different course for that term.

Class Cancellations

Because your high school decides if a class will be offered, it's very rare that Ridgewater would have to cancel a course. If a course cancellation is necessary, we'll work with your high school administration to find alternative dual-credit options. Should an alternative option not be possible, the course will be cancelled and students will be notified in writing no later than 2-weeks before the start date. The high school administration will then assist students in finding an alternative course.

Attendance Policies

While your high school attendance policy may still apply, it's important to remember that Ridgewater policy is also in effect. Therefore, in your CIS classes, instructors are under no obligation to accept late work. Please make sure you understand expectations around absences and late assignments.

Academic Policies

Taking college level courses in high school is a big commitment. As this handbook has pointed out, high school policies and college policies can also have some big differences.

College in the Schools students and their families are asked to read through these important Ridgewater College policies, and bookmark this online guide for future reference.

1

Staying in Good Academic Standing

Students in the College in the Schools program must maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA with their Ridgewater College courses. Failure to maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA will result in being placed on academic probation. Continued time on academic probation can result in possible suspension from the College. Probation and/or suspension can follow a student to the college or university they plan to attend after high school. It can impact admissions decisions (including admission into competitive programs or degrees), financial aid eligibility, etc. Probation and/or suspension--while it can be appealed--is permanently noted on your transcript forever.

Even if a student has a cumulative GPA of a 2.0 or higher, they can also be placed on probation or suspended if they have a course completion rate lower than 66.66%. The completion rate is a ratio looking at courses where a passing grade is earned, compared to courses where a student has a failing grade (F), Withdrawal (W) or Incomplete (I). If a student wishes not to take the class after they've been registered, it's very important to drop the course within the first 10 business days to avoid a "W" mark on their transcript.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

2

It is the policy of Ridgewater College that each campus shall make services available for any student who discloses a disability and, through a recent assessment, can document the barriers their disability causes on learning outcomes. A case-by-case determination will be made to establish eligibility for services and the nature and extent of such services. Recent disability documentation is required. Students are need to schedule a meeting with Disability Services. It is recommended to have this meeting six weeks before the beginning of the semester and/or course to ensure that services can be provided in a timely manner. Some, not all, accommodation cost will be charged to the student's participating school, (such as a sign language interpreter for the deaf or hard of hearing). Students on an IEP or 504 plan that specifies general education support and accommodations will be supported by Ridgewater College.

It is important to understand the differences between high school and college level course work and the accommodations that are available at the postsecondary level. College credit earned through a concurrent enrollment option becomes part of the student's college transcript and is transferable to other colleges. For that reason, a course taken for college credit must maintain the integrity and rigor of college level work regardless of where the class is taught. Students with disabilities who meet the prerequisites of a course may be provided reasonable accommodations that allow equal access, basically to level the playing field. However, colleges will not provide modifications to change the course content or performance expectations that would substantially alter the essential elements of the course. Students need to understand that not all accommodations available at the high school will be allowed in college level classes.

For further information, contact Jay Morrison at 320-222-8040 or Sarah Fosso 320-234-8650



3 FERPA

College students are entering into an exciting new phase of adult responsibilities and privileges. This phase comes with some federal and state data privacy protection that separates the role of parents from the student. The Family Education Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) requires that specific information related to a student's educational records may not be shared with anyone (including parents) other than the student. The law does not consider age, so even if you are under the age of 18, the privacy laws shall apply. Faculty or staff may not discuss private matters or grades with a student's parents or guardian unless the student chooses to sign the written authorization. A copy of our authorization form is available on the Ridgewater College website under *Student Forms*.

Appealing a Grade



A student who has questions regarding his/her course grade must speak with the instructor within two weeks from the date grades are posted online. In cases in which the instructor is unavailable during this time, the student must speak with the instructor as soon as the instructor is available. If, after speaking with the instructor in a good-faith effort to resolve a grade dispute, a student still believes that his/her course grade was assigned in a way that is arbitrary, prejudicial, or in error, the student may make a formal grade appeal no later than two weeks after speaking with the instructor. If no formal appeal is made by the end of these two weeks, the student will have no rights to formally appeal the course grade.



5 Dropping or Withdrawing from a Course

To drop a College in the Schools course, please talk with your guidance counselor and your instructor first. While the choice to drop or withdraw from the class is up to you, there may be resources available to you to help you successfully complete the course. If you want to adjust your course schedule and no longer be enrolled into the course, you need to contact both your high school registration office AND Ridgewater College by 4:00 p.m. no later than the 10th business day of the course. There will be no impact on your Ridgewater transcript. After the 10th business day you may withdraw from the course, but you will be issued a mark of a "W". As outlined on the previous page (under point 1: *Staying in Good Academic Standing*) "W" marks can impact future admission decisions and/or financial aid awards. Therefore, please make careful considerations before withdrawing from your course.

Student Code of Conduct

6

Ridgewater College is committed to the creation & maintenance of an academic community which fosters the intellectual, personal, social & ethical development of its students. Respect for the rights of others and self-discipline are essential for the fulfillment of these goals. This Code of Conduct is designed to explain the rights and responsibilities inherent in membership in this community.

Students of Ridgewater College are expected to conduct themselves as mature citizens both on and off campus. Students are expected to comply with all regulations established by the administration, faculty and students for the benefit of the total campus community. This matter is one of individual responsibility and consideration of the rights of others.

7

Cheating & Plagiarism

Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1.) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests or examinations; (2.) use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; (3.) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the College faculty or staff; (4.) engaging in any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion.

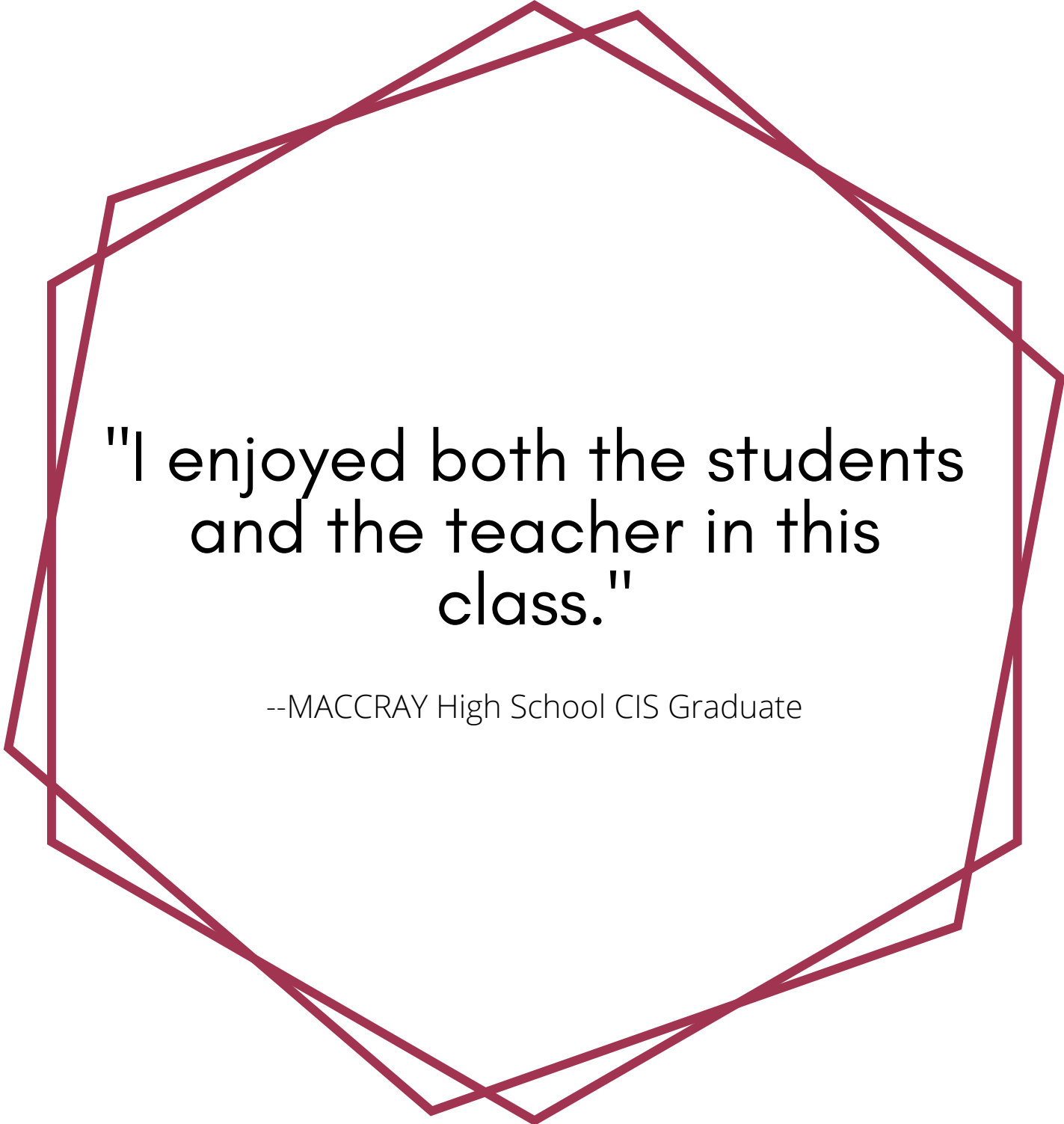
Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

Use of AI

8

Ridgewater College has implemented an AI Scale for all faculty, staff, and students to indicate when (and if) AI use is appropriate. Your instructor will indicate where their course and/or assignments fall on this scale and it is your responsibility to follow those guidelines. If no AI score is listed, it should be assumed that AI is not allowed unless explicitly approved by the instructor. In courses or on assignments where AI is not allowable, and a student still uses AI, it may be considered cheating and/or plagiarism and will be graded appropriately by the instructor based on their classroom expectations in accordance with Ridgewater College policies. Check your class syllabus for more information.

Any student found to have committed or to have attempted to commit the misconduct in circumstances falling under this jurisdiction may be subject to the disciplinary sanctions outlined in Article III, section C of the Student Code of Conduct.



"I enjoyed both the students
and the teacher in this
class."

--MACCRAY High School CIS Graduate

Transferring Credits



Data indicates that almost all of our CIS students have been successful in earning transfer credit. Within the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities system, credits should transfer successfully. Schools outside of Minnesota, as well as our in-state private institutions have also accepted Ridgewater College credits.

However, it is up to the university or college to determine if they'll accept and/or apply the credits towards your major. It is in your best interest to have conversations early and often with the schools you hope to attend to understand their transfer credit policies.

Usually, credits will:

- Transfer directly to your chosen degree, or
- Be accepted as elective credits towards your degree, or
- Exempt you from taking a required course, or
- Place you in a higher level course

Helpful Tips for Transferring Credit

1

Save your Syllabus

Because every institution is different in how they evaluate credit, save your syllabus should you need to file an appeal. It will be the "proof" they need to make a better, informed decision.

2

Save your Course Materials

Like the transcript, having your course materials handy will also help to prove the course's rigor.

3

Work with a Transfer Specialist

If transfer credit is denied simply because the course was taken as part of College in the Schools, please contact Ridgewater College and ask to speak with a Transfer Specialist.

Need a transcript? You can order it online at getmytranscript.com or stop by our campus and speak with the campus registrar

Student Services

Your success in College in the Schools courses is important to us! We know that students are better prepared for college and complete their course work when they have access to college services. Like a traditional Ridgewater College student, you also have access to those same services and offices.

At any time, you are welcome to use these services at no cost to you. However, some services (like academic advising and counseling) require students to make an appointment.



Warrior Card

Each student can obtain a nontransferable, photo ID card which will provide identification for the test center, library, student center, school events, athletic events, theater tickets, etc. To get your card, stop on campus and visit the Student Senate office. Students needing a replacement card may be charged a replacement fee.



Ridgewater College Library

Located on both the Hutchinson and Willmar campuses, the Ridgewater College Library holds a print collection of over 50,000 volumes including 17,000 electronic books, over 250 unique periodical titles, and additional non-print materials available in a variety of formats. The library collections are searched through the PALS online catalog. Additionally, via interlibrary loan (ILL), materials from the collections of 125+ libraries in Minnesota are available through the state supported Minitex program. Numerous general and subject-specific online databases provide citations and full text articles to magazines, journals, and newspaper articles, books, and a variety of other reference sources.

To borrow materials from the library, a Ridgewater College ID is required.



eServices

eServices is a "one stop shop" for students. From here you can access schedules, see your grade, access email, and other important student services. To log in, visit the Ridgewater College website and click the Student Logins link at the top of the page. From the menu select eServices.



StarID

As a Ridgewater student, you will be given a unique StarID. If you've taken courses at another Minnesota State institution, the StarID you received will be the same here at Ridgewater. You will use this to access eServices where you can view your final course grade, when ordering official transcripts, and to use the on campus computer labs.



Academic Advising and Counseling

Both the Willmar and Hutchinson campuses of Ridgewater College has professional academic advisors and counselors on staff for students to use. Students who are taking several College in the Schools courses and/or Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) are encouraged to meet with an advisor or counselor as they work towards earning college credit before graduation. Advisors and counselors can assist students in choosing the right classes based on their desired fields of study, as well as where they plan to attend after graduation. To schedule an appointment, please contact the college directly to make an appointment.



Computer Lab Use & Technology Support

All faculty & students at Ridgewater College are provided access to computer labs on campus. These labs are located in the library and allow you access to Office365, the internet, as well as free printing! To access the labs, it will require the use of your StarID. Students also have free access to Office365 that can be downloaded onto personal computers or devices.



Tutoring

Tutoring is available for students both in person and online. Tutoring services on campus vary from semester to semester as they're led by students. Online tutoring is free of charge and are available for every student, even if they're not taking an online class. If you would like to set up tutoring, email Audrey VanBeck at: Audrey.VanBeck@ridgewater.edu



Connect with Us!

If you have any questions or need clarification on any of the policies, recommendations, or expectations of the College in the Schools program at Ridgewater College, please reach out!

College in the Schools
Ridgewater College
cis@ridgewater.edu

www.ridgewater.edu/cis

