

Reading: Reading Specialist Emphasis - Master of Science in Education

UWL's **online reading and literacy programs** prepare licensed teachers to use science-backed, evidence-based strategies that improve reading outcomes for learners from early childhood through high school. Designed for working educators, these flexible programs allow candidates to immediately apply what they learn in their own classroom and school—while progressing toward advanced credentials aligned with Wisconsin DPI requirements.

Graduates of this program earn a Master of Science in Education degree. Wisconsin educators are eligible for a Reading Specialist (5017) license. Note: the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requires all Reading Specialists to possess a Reading Teacher (1316) license.

Master of Science in Education in Reading Program

The **online Master of Science in Education (MSED) in Reading – Reading Specialist program** at University of Wisconsin–La Crosse prepares educators to serve as literacy leaders at the school and district levels. The 30 credit program develops advanced expertise in literacy instruction, assessment, and systems-level leadership to support comprehensive literacy improvement efforts.

Through rigorous coursework and field-based experiences, candidates develop the capacity to design, implement, and evaluate effective literacy programs across diverse educational settings. The curriculum incorporates the requirements of Wisconsin Act 20, emphasizing structured literacy, science of reading research, universal screening, progress monitoring, and evidence-based interventions consistent with state mandates.

Graduates of the MSED Reading Specialist program are prepared to:

- Model and lead the implementation of best practices in PK–12 literacy education;
- Apply advanced knowledge of the science of reading to support instruction and intervention;
- Lead literacy assessment systems, including screening, diagnosis, and evaluation;
- Coach and support teachers in the use of evidence-based literacy practices;
- Design and evaluate school- or district-wide literacy initiatives aligned with state policy;
- Advocate for equitable literacy outcomes and sustained improvement across systems.

The MSED Reading Specialist program is aligned with the 2017 Standards for Reading Professionals of the International Literacy Association and the Wisconsin Administrator Standards (PI 34.003). These standards emphasize leadership in literacy, a broad and inclusive definition of literacy, and the application of research to improve instruction, assessment, and systems-level outcomes.

Offered in a fully online format, the program is designed for Wisconsin educators seeking to expand their impact beyond the classroom

and assume administrative leadership roles in reading and literacy education. Graduates are prepared to meet current state expectations, including those outlined in Wisconsin Act 20, and to guide sustainable, evidence-based reading and literacy improvement efforts.

This program is offered at various times throughout the year.

Program requirements

Admission

To qualify for unconditional admission to the Reading: Reading Specialist (5017) Emphasis, a candidate for the program must:

- Meet all UWL graduate application requirements. (<https://catalog.uwlax.edu/graduate/admissions/#apply>)
- Hold a bachelor's degree in education from an accredited institution.
- Have an overall undergraduate grade point average of 2.85 or higher on a 4.00 scale.
- Provide evidence of reading teaching license or certificate (i.e. copy of reading teaching license).
- Complete a successful criminal background check (initiated by UWL).

Criminal background check

The WI Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requires that candidates for admission to a teacher education, administration, or pupil services program successfully pass a criminal background check (CBC) as one criterion for admission. By applying for admission to one of these programs, candidates agree to provide the necessary personal information to UWL in order to initiate their CBC and to complete their portion of the process prior to the deadline specified in their admission letter. Program candidates are responsible for all costs associated with their criminal background check(s).

Out-of-state applicants

This program may meet other states' licensing requirements. An applicant's state may or may not require that the applicant get a Wisconsin teaching license to be endorsed for their program of study. The Wisconsin licensing process may include taking coursework in Native American Studies (ACT 31). The applicant should check with their state licensing board prior to applying to ensure they understand the appropriate pathway to meet their state's licensing requirements.

Curriculum

(30 credits)

Code	Title	Credits
RDG 600	Research Methods in Literacy	3
RDG 711	Advanced Research Methods in Literacy	3
RDG 718	Guiding and Directing a Schoolwide Reading/Literacy Program	3
RDG 780	Reading Specialist Practicum	3
Action Research in Literacy (six credits required)		6
RDG 799	Action Research in Literacy	
Reading electives		12
RDG 601	Literacy and Language Development and Instruction	
RDG 702	Disciplinary Literacy	
RDG 703	Literacy Assessment and Instruction	

RDG 704	Emergent Literacy
RDG 714	Reading Teacher Practicum
RDG 715	Children's and Adolescent Literature
Other reading course credits	
Total Credits	30

Program completion and eligibility for certification

Eligibility for Reading Specialist (5017) certification is contingent upon:

- Satisfactory completion of Reading Specialist (5017) Program coursework, associated experiences, and artifacts.
- Passing score on the Foundations of Reading Test or hold a WI Lifetime Administrator License.
- Completion of DPI employment verification form (<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/licensing/f1613.pdf>) documenting at least six semesters as the teacher of record, or at least six semesters as a school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker and 540 hours of classroom teaching experience in K-12 schools,
 - Or hold a WI Lifetime Teaching License.

Degree requirements

University graduate degree requirements

After being admitted to the program of one's choice, candidates for a graduate degree must:

1. Complete any preliminary course work and deficiencies.
2. Complete all courses and other program requirements, including residence requirements prescribed for the degree desired in the respective school or college within a seven-year period from the date of initial enrollment, with the exception of students enrolled in the Student Affairs Administration and Leadership Ed.D. (SAA Ed.D.) graduate program. SAA Ed.D. students must complete all degree requirements within ten years from the time of initial enrollment in the graduate program.
3. Earn a minimum of 30 credits for a master's degree; 54 credits for a doctorate or post-master's degree. Earn at least one-half of the minimum number of credits required in the program in graduate-only level courses (700, 800, 900, and non-slash 600 level courses). Some UWL graduate programs require more than 30 graduate credits. Please review the individual program requirements (<http://catalog.uwlax.edu/graduate/programrequirements/>) listed in the catalog for the exact number of credits required.
4. Earn a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.00.
5. Satisfy dissertation, thesis, seminar paper, terminal/graduate projects and internships, or comprehensive examination, where applicable. A dissertation or thesis approved by the committee must be submitted to Graduate & Extended Learning for editorial review and approval by the Dean of Graduate & Extended Learning. The recommended initial submission date for review is two weeks before commencement. Ordinarily, a seminar paper or project report does not have to be approved by the Dean of Graduate & Extended Learning. However, if the seminar paper or project report is to be archived in Murphy Library, the student must follow the same rules as they apply to the dissertation/thesis requiring approval from the Dean of Graduate & Extended Learning. For further research/dissertation/thesis guidelines (<https://www.uwlax.edu/gel/graduate-education/thesis-and-dissertation/>), see Graduate & Extended Learning.
6. File a completed "Intent to Graduate" form online via the WINGS Student Center immediately following registration for the final semester or summer term in residence. December graduates and winter intersession should file by May 1. May and summer graduates should file by December 1.
7. Pay the graduation fee and remove all other indebtedness to the university. Payment of graduation fees does not imply readiness for graduation and does not take the place of applying for graduation.
8. Complete all requirements within 30 days after the official ending date of a term in order for a degree to be awarded for that term. (See #5 above for separate deadline for written capstone experience.)