The M.S. degree in Special Education prepares students to serve as resources and advocates for students with disabilities and their families, and to work cooperatively with schools and community agencies to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities. The M.S. degree in Special Education offers two named options: the Teacher Certification program and the Research and Theory program.

Graduates of the Teacher Certification program are eligible to apply for Wisconsin cross-categorical Special Education licensure at the middle childhood through early adolescence level (ages 6–12/13), and at the early adolescence through adolescence level (ages 10–21). The program is an applied professional training program, preparing students to go directly into positions as Special Education teachers.

The Research and Theory program option focuses on graduate-level research and theory in the field of Special Education. A plan of study generally includes multiple research courses and theory courses in Special Education as well as related coursework from other departments that contribute to the student's academic and research interests. The program deepens students' academic preparation to understand key questions and issues in the field of special education and to strengthen students' analytical and research skills. These skills contribute to the development of high-quality scholars and leaders in the field. Most graduates choose to pursue further study in a doctoral program, or to pursue positions in schools or community-based agencies, or advocacy organizations that promote independence and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Special Education is one of the two academic areas in the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education. The areas are joined by a common mission of preparing professional leadership personnel to address the educational and rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities across the life span. Both special education and rehabilitation psychology offer programs leading to Ph.D., M.S., and B.S. degrees. Special education addresses the needs of children, youth, and young adults through its teacher education, research, and service programs. Rehabilitation psychology addresses the needs of older youth, young adults, and adults. Department faculty in both areas join resources to provide training and research programs that promote successful transition from school to the world of work, post-secondary education, and successful psycho-social adaptation for individuals with disabilities.

Special Education faculty research focuses on the following areas:
- Research methodologies in special education
- Diversity and equity issues in the field of special education
- Literacy and reading instruction for individuals with disabilities
- Teacher education and preparation of high-quality special education teachers
- Evidence-based interventions with students with severe disabilities including multiple disabilities, intellectual disability and autism
- Special education issues in adolescence, transitional and vocational education