The Conditional “U” in Writing

In addition to assigning a “U” in writing at the end of the semester, you have the option of assigning a Conditional “U” during the semester if you feel that weak writing skills will impede the success of one or more of your students. Following are details about the Conditional “U” in Q & A form and the procedure for assigning a Conditional “U.”

How does the Conditional “U” differ from the end-of-semester “U” in writing?
The Conditional “U” does not appear on the student’s transcript so it does not have to be officially removed by the Writing Center. It is, however, a formal referral and agreement between you, the student and the Writing Center while the student is still in your class rather than after the term has ended. You guide the process more directly than with an end-of-semester “U,” when the Writing Center staff creates the program. [Please note: The Conditional “U” in writing is not the same as the midterm grade of “U,” which signifies an estimated grade in a course of lower than C-].

What is “Conditional” about the Conditional “U”? The assumption is that students assigned a Conditional “U” will receive an end-of-semester “U” in the class unless they improve their writing skills. These students also might not earn “R” credit or might not pass the class if their skills do not improve. The Conditional “U” gives students a way to avoid those circumstances and begin to improve their writing skills right away. You apply the specific conditions that a student has to fulfill, such as working in the Writing Center on revisions of an assignment or preparing future assignments in stages from drafting to revision, or attending regular meetings with a Writing Center tutor. You can also specify the types of skills the student needs to work on, the number of revisions required, and the number of tutoring sessions you expect the student to attend.

Can I still assign an end-of-semester “U” to a student I have assigned a Conditional “U”? Yes. If a student’s writing skills have not improved sufficiently and could still benefit from regular instruction, or if the student did not follow through with the terms you established, you can assign an end-of-semester “U” in writing along with the final course grade.

What are some of the benefits of assigning a Conditional “U”? The Conditional “U” allows you to identify specific writing goals and outcomes for students so they can develop the skills they need to succeed in your course and other courses. Professors can assign the Conditional “U” to encourage students to work on their writing skills during the semester, when attention to their writing will have the greatest impact on their written assignments that term. The Conditional “U” gives students a better chance of success on written assignments and increases the likelihood they can earn “R” credit.

When and in what circumstances should I consider assigning a Conditional “U” in writing?
You can assign a Conditional “U” any time during the semester, but the earlier the better after you have noticed problems with a student’s writing. If you assess your students’ writing early in the semester and think you are likely to assign a student a “U” at the end of the term, or are concerned that a student might not pass the class or earn an “R” unless writing skills improve, you might consider assigning that student a Conditional “U.” A Conditional “U” could be helpful for students whose skills need to improve in one or more major areas of writing, such as writing with sources or developing sentence-level skills, or who have more global, large-scale writing problems. Again, the main consideration is that you would consider assigning a “U” at the end of the term unless the student’s skills improve.

What happens after I assign a Conditional “U”? We will send follow up emails to the students and let you know if students have come to work with us, and you can contact the Writing Center to check on students’ progress at any time. However, you establish the terms of completion and then determine if students have made sufficient improvement in their writing skills and fulfilled the conditions you agreed on with the students. (The referral form includes a space for signatures and dates so you can establish clear agreement.) Based on your re-assessment of their skills and a review of their participation in tutoring, you decide whether to give students a “U” at the end of the term and/or grant “R” credit.

What can I do if students have notable problems with writing but not sufficient to merit a “U”? You can encourage students to visit the Writing Center, request they visit in a note on an assignment, or let them know you expect them to visit and send us a “Writing Center Referral Form.”
Procedure for Assigning a Conditional “U” in Writing:

1. Discuss the Conditional “U” with the students you plan to refer to the Writing Center:
   - Inform students that you would like them to work on their writing skills, and explain they will receive a “U” at the end of the semester unless they improve their writing in one or more revisions or additional writing assignments. If they are in a writing-intensive course, explain they may not get “R” credit.
   - Talk to students about course writing objectives and goals and outline the requirements (e.g., revision expectations and the number of Writing Center visits) they need to fulfill to complete their individualized tutoring programs. These requirements will vary from student to student, depending on the student’s skill level, the length of the paper(s), revision expectations, and possibly other criteria. Note these expectations (or conditions) in the “Recommended Plan” section of the Conditional “U” Referral Form.
   - Explain the potential benefits of the Conditional “U” option, such as
     - Receiving individualized one-on-one writing instruction
     - Improving the quality of writing in subsequent course papers
     - Improving writing skills so students are prepared to meet greater writing challenges
     - Addressing writing obstacles now to prevent receiving a “U” at the end of the term
     - Earning “R” credit for a writing-intensive course
   - Emphasize that even if students fulfill the Conditional “U” obligations identified in the Conditional “U” referral form—and even if their writing improves during the semester—an end-of-the semester “U” may still be warranted if students have not met the writing objectives of the course or demonstrated writing competency equivalent to their peers or appropriate to their class status.

2. Complete the referral form and sign the Conditional “U” agreement with the student
   - Students should bring the Conditional “U” Referral Form” to the first appointment. (See below.) You may also send this form to us if you don’t have a chance to talk about the Conditional “U” with the student, but we hope you will be able to review and sign the form together as a contract between you and the student.

3. Prepare students for their first Writing Center appointment. Please ask them to
   - Call (740-368-3925) or stop by the Writing Center (Corns 316) to schedule an appointment
   - Bring any writing prompt(s) and graded or “marked” paper(s) to the first appointment
   - Bring the completed referral form/contract to their first meeting.

Please Contact Martine Stephens (mlstephe@owu.edu ; 740-368-3926) if you have questions or would like to share additional information about a student you have assigned a Conditional “U.”