

Guidelines and Consequences of an Unsatisfactory grade of “U” in Thesis or Dissertation Research

Effective Spring 2024 – Policy Adopted by Academic Council on 3/20/2024; Revised on 12/3/2025.

Proposal: Changing the grading scheme for theses/dissertation research (MSCI 599/699) in William & Mary’s Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences & VIMS from “G” to “U – Unsatisfactory”.

Rationale: The grading scheme for graduate level courses in the Batten School & VIMS is described in the current [graduate catalog](#) and embedded below.

Grading and Quality Points

The grades A, B, C, P (pass, in certain courses), D, and F are used to indicate the quality of work in a course. Also used are ‘+’ and ‘-’ notations, except that there is no ‘A+’. ‘W’ indicates that a student withdrew from the university before the end of the ninth week of classes or dropped a course between the end of the ninth week of classes and the last day of class and was passing at the time that the course was dropped.

For each semester credit in a course in which a student is graded A, 4.0 quality points are awarded; A-, 3.7; B+, 3.3; B, 3.0; B-, 2.7; C+, 2.3; C, 2.0; C-, 1.7; D+, 1.3; D, 1.0; D-, 0.7. P carries credit but is not included in a student’s quality point average. A course graded D+, D, D-, or F is included in the student’s quality point average but carries no credit towards the graduate degree.

In addition to the grades A, B, C, P, D, F, and W, the symbols ‘G’, ‘O’, ‘U’, and ‘I’ are used on grade reports and in the university records. When a student audits a course, a grade of ‘O’ or ‘U’ indicates a successful or unsuccessful completion of the audit. When documenting work in-progress towards M.S. ([MSCI 599](#)) or Ph.D. ([MSCI 699](#)) research, a grade of ‘G’ or ‘U’ is given since there is insufficient evidence upon which to base a standard letter grade.

A grade of ‘U’ is only given to a student under exceptional circumstances, truly justifying unsatisfactory progress in thesis or dissertation research despite the advisor(s)’ attempts to address the student’s research performance. Advance consultation with the approval of the Batten School & VIMS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs is required before a ‘U’ grade may be submitted for unsatisfactory progress in research.

The ‘G’ is not used as an alternative to ‘I’ when the student is the cause for the non-completion. Unlike the deferred grade ‘I’, ‘G’ or ‘U’ does not automatically revert to ‘F’ after one semester.

‘I’ indicates that because of illness or other major extenuating circumstances the student has postponed, with the explicit consent of the instructor, the completion of certain required work. ‘I’ automatically becomes ‘F’ at the end of the next semester if the postponed work has not been completed, unless the instructor requests an extension for another semester. An ‘I’ may not be extended more than once without the approval of the Batten School & VIMS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

As noted above, ‘G’ is given to work in progress towards M.S. (MSCI 599) or Ph.D. (MSCI 699) research, since there is insufficient evidence upon which to base a grade.

A grade of “U” for “Unsatisfactory” requires that students and mentors communicate and mutually agree to thesis/dissertation research objectives for the student. If the student legitimately attempts to meet those objectives, then the student should not receive a U. Extenuating circumstances such as personal health and welfare, lack of resources to be able to conduct lab/field work, lack of communication from advisor, may prevent a student from completing their thesis or dissertation objectives. Thus, these should not lead to the student receiving a U.

A grade of “U” for “Unsatisfactory” would be given to a student for their thesis or dissertation research under **exceptional** circumstances, truly justifying poor progress on thesis or dissertation research despite the advisor(s)’ attempts to address the student’s research performance. A grade of U may only be given to a student after all three conditions below are met by the advisor throughout the semester. The advisor

1) provides documentation with a time stamp of their preceding regular semester discussion outlining thesis/dissertation objectives,

2) demonstrates that they have been unsuccessful in their attempts to contact the student about delays or not been informed by the student of any delays or extenuating circumstances which merit a delay in thesis/dissertation progress, and

3) discusses the student’s lack of progress with the Office for Academic Affairs (OAA) and confirms that OAA agrees that the student should indeed get a “U”.

OAA will make a reasonable effort to meet directly with the student and discuss any extenuating circumstances before deciding whether a “U” grade is warranted.

Examples:

Case A) At the beginning of the semester, the student and advisor meet and mutually agree to meeting certain goals for field work, computer work, lab work, or writing. The advisor checks in with the student regularly and asks about progress. The student doesn’t inform the advisor of any extenuating circumstances justifying an extension of time to meet the goals. At the end of the semester, the student does not produce any products upon which they mutually agreed. The advisor contacts OAA and informs them of the concern. The OAA contacts the student and discusses reasons as to why the student did not meet their goals. The OAA does not recommend giving the student a U; the student revealed to OAA that they underwent personal challenges about which they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed.

Resolution: The advisor cannot give the student a U given that condition 3 has not been met.

Case B) Beginning where Case A left off and carrying into the next semester, the advisor meets with the student and clarifies the goals for the semester and communicates with the student regularly throughout the semester. Yet, the student repeats their performance and doesn’t meet their semester’s research goals. The advisor contacts OAA. OAA has a conference with the student and decides that the student can get a U.

Resolution: The advisor can give the student a U – all three conditions have been met.

Consequences of Receiving a Grade of U

A grade of “U” remains on the student’s transcript unless the advisor retroactively changes the grade.

A single instance of a grade of U – OAA informs the student that their funding may be in jeopardy; a remediation plan must be drafted and agreed upon by the student, advisor, and OAA. OAA will remain engaged throughout the remediation plan, including mediating meetings between student and advisor where needed.

Two instances of grades of U (non-consecutive or consecutive) – the advisor or OAA can withdraw the student’s funding.

Three grades of U (non-consecutive or consecutive) – dismissal from the program.