

## **EXTRA POINTS**

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*Elizabeth Goldsmith is a graduate student at New Jersey University, teaching an undergraduate course in Organizational Behavior in the spring semester. One of her students, RJ Bryant, is a junior on the football team. RJ comes from an underprivileged household and football is his ticket out of the projects. He is also the only star on a rather lackluster NJU team, and is projected to be drafted by the NFL in the second round after his senior year.*

*After the finals have been graded, RJ received a C in the course. Soon after, Elizabeth received a call from a member of the athletic department Academic Support Unit. The administrator informed Elizabeth that RJ needed to get at least a C+ in the Organizational Behavior course in order to remain eligible to play football the following fall. All other avenues had been pursued and Elizabeth was RJ's last chance to remain academically eligible; was there anything that RJ could do to raise his grade? Elizabeth must decide if she should allow RJ to do some extra work in order to raise his grade.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Elizabeth Goldsmith was sitting at her desk at New Jersey University (NJU), organizing her files and notes at the end of the spring semester. She had turned in her grades the past Monday, well ahead of the Friday due date. She was just about ready to leave her office when the phone rang. “Elizabeth?” an unfamiliar voice asked, “This is Amy Olsen from the Athletic Department. How are you?” After exchanging pleasantries, Amy got to the point. RJ Bryant, one of Elizabeth’s students in her Organizational Behavior class this spring semester, had received a C in Elizabeth’s class; the problem was, he needed to receive a C+ in order to remain academically eligible for the NJU football team. Was there anything Elizabeth could do? “I can’t just raise his grade,” Elizabeth responded.

“No, I’m not asking you to do that,” Amy replied, “but is there anything extra that RJ could do to raise his grade? A missed homework assignment he could turn in, or perhaps some extra credit? You’re our last hope; if he doesn’t get this grade, then he misses next fall’s football season and his chance for an NFL career. I’m also afraid, given his background, that if he isn’t on the team he may drop out of school altogether.”

“Let me think about this,” Elizabeth replied. “When do you need an answer from me?” “Within the next two days. Final grades are due then. If you agree to help him out, then we must change his grade to an Incomplete by Friday afternoon and then we can update his grade once he does whatever work he needs to do to get him to a C+.” Elizabeth then promised Amy that she would get back to her within the next day or so with an answer.

### **ELIZABETH GOLDSMITH**

Elizabeth Goldsmith was just finishing up her third year of graduate school, pursuing a PhD in Organizational Behavior. After receiving her undergraduate degree in Mathematics, Elizabeth went to work at a large telecom company, but found the work unfulfilling. The only part she had truly enjoyed was supervising and mentoring her employees. After several years, she decided to return to school to pursue her doctorate in order to become a college professor.

The Organizational Behavior class she taught in the spring was the third such course she had taught at NJU. Although coming out of undergraduate school she had had trouble speaking in front of large groups, she found herself at ease in front of a classroom. Her “real life” work experiences provided her with ample material to enhance the course discussions. She also tried to bring some management principles into the classroom, such as empowering the students and setting goals and objectives. Her course also had a strong ethics component to it and Elizabeth emphasized the importance of being ethical not just in business, but everyday life.

While NJU was a research institute, it recognized the importance of training good educators, and Elizabeth (and other graduate students) was given full accountability and responsibility for the course. Elizabeth had designed the course material, picked out the book, created the syllabus, and had final say on the grades. It was not unusual for her course to have student athletes in it and this past semester was no exception: in addition to three lacrosse players, Elizabeth’s class also included RJ Bryant, the star of a rather dismal football team.

### **RJ BRYANT**

RJ Bryant was born and raised in the Newark projects. His father, Ralph senior (RJ stood for “Ralph Junior”), worked as a janitor and his mother took care of the seven children. RJ was the fifth of seven. Money was always tight. An indifferent student in high school, an athletic scholarship was the only way that RJ would be able to afford college. Luckily his size (6’6” 247 pounds), his speed and his incredibly soft hands were enough for New Jersey University to offer RJ a full ride despite average grades and low SATs. Although he had other offers from more prestigious football schools, RJ decided to stay closer to home and attend NJU.

When RJ arrived on campus, NJU had just finished its third lackluster season in a row, winning only two games the previous fall, none in their conference. With a new coach and a promising quarterback, NJU had increased its win total to six by RJ’s junior year. Still a

mediocre team, RJ was a star, having made all-conference as a tight end his sophomore and junior years. NFL scouts were starting to notice and, if he had a good senior year, he was projected to be drafted no later than the second round.

In the classroom, RJ struggled, not for lack of trying, but due to his poor educational foundation and the demands that football put on his time. He was a Business Administration major and, while he probably would not graduate on time, he would only be a few courses shy of a degree—the first one in his family to get one—by the end of his senior year. Every semester was a struggle and this one was no different. RJ always seemed to be just on the edge of maintaining the C average he needed to be eligible.

### **THE DILEMMA**

Elizabeth Goldsmith was well-aware of RJ's background. As a former college athlete herself, and die-hard sports fan, Elizabeth had a special affinity for student athletes, and used them in her classes to elicit stories on topics such as teamwork and goal setting. She had taken a liking to RJ, who never missed her class. He sat in the back and didn't volunteer to answer questions. But when called on to give examples of motivation, for example, he never failed her, and Elizabeth often called on him in this way in order to get him to participate. When he struggled with the initial homework assignments, she spoke to him after class and got to know more about his situation. She, of course, was aware of his prowess on the football field, and knew of his importance to NJU finally gaining some modicum of respect in its conference. This had been a long time coming. NJU had very high academic standards, especially when compared to other schools in its conference, and its philosophy had always been that it refused to lower its standards just for the sake of athletics. Admitting a marginal student like RJ, while common at other schools, was unusual for NJU. Recent student-athlete academic scandals at other large state universities had bolstered the administration's view that their philosophy was a sound one.

RJ did not receive any special treatment, however. Elizabeth met with other struggling students and did not give RJ—or any other athlete—additional time or resources to complete his assignments unless this was granted to everyone in the course. Elizabeth's own value system was driven by fairness and justice—not showing favoritism to one group of people. She had always been bothered by her former company's policy of rewarding people for who they knew rather than how they performed.

RJ had received a C in her course. His class attendance and participation were fine, in fact above average. He had missed a couple of homework assignments early in the semester and his grades on the exams averaged a B-. His paper and final exam were both C's.

As she reviewed RJ's work, Elizabeth determined that RJ could have gotten a C+ in the course if he had completed the early homework assignments. But should she allow him to do this work? She reflected on her dilemma: to go against her principles and give special treatment to an athlete or to potentially ruin someone's future over a couple of missed homework assignments. Was there any real harm in changing his grade? What should she do?

Should Elizabeth allow RJ to make up the work in order to raise his grade?

What ethical theories apply to your decision? Which ones would justify giving RJ another chance; which ones would say that his grade should stay as is?

What are Elizabeth's alternatives besides giving RJ the chance to make up missed assignments? How might this case be applied to a business setting?