

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for writing. As you may be aware, the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) prohibits me from disclosing details of Brian's educational record to anyone other than him unless I am given written consent by Brian to make such disclosure to a specific person or persons. A detailed explanation of the FERPA restrictions are maintained on Radford's website at <http://www.radford.edu/~registra/students/ferpa.html>. Nonetheless, I believe I can tell you some highly relevant things without violating the FERPA.

To begin with, all of Brian's grades are available to him online, on the course WebCT page. He is free to show you this page at his discretion at any time. It details his exact homework, midterms, and final exam grades. The course syllabus is also available on WebCT, and it details how to calculate Brian's raw percentage for the course from his individual homework and exam grades. (Also available on this site are complete copies of the course notes, copies of the midterms, and written solutions to all graded exercises.)

Second, I am quite at liberty to explain my grading policy. As a professor, I balance many considerations in assessment. First and foremost, assessment is itself a tool for instruction. Students learn from each assessment something about themselves and – just as important – something about the standards of the discipline they have undertaken to master. This is as true of the final assessment, the course grade, as it is of each intermediate assessment, whether homework or exam. The final grade is unique in that it is also publicized to the administration and to anyone, such as an employer or other learning institution, that is given the student's transcript. In this role the grade not only rates the student but certifies him or her for future employment or educational opportunities. Consequently, when I award a final grade, I am beholden to the concerns of the student and his or her aspirations and goals, but I am also beholden to the future employer or educator who is relying on my assessment to risk resources and (in the case of future teachers) the minds of our youth on my judgment. Finally, the grades I and my colleagues assign determine the standard of learning and accomplishment for our institution, and to some extent for higher education generally. As such, although each individual grade is only one among thousands, each has a very long reach in shaping our society.

So I will award a grade of A only to a student who meets every standard of learning in the course, and who in addition consistently exhibits excellence in their work. Absent consistent excellence, I award a B to the student who meets every standard. I award a C to the student who has met most of the standards of learning, but continues to struggle in acquiring some key skills or concepts. I award a grade of D to a student who is capable but appears, based on their performance and effort, unable to commit themselves to achieving a minimum acceptable standard. I reserve a failing grade only for those students who do not meet minimum standards of learning, and who seem unable to do so at the level of the course. This indicates that the student must, if he or she is to continue to pursue the same educational goals, be prepared to repeat coursework and – most critical – thoughtfully reexamine their goals and priorities with an eye towards reinventing themselves as a student.

With regard to Brian, I am very sympathetic. When I first attempted college, at about Brian's age, I flunked out. It is clear that, as I was, he is bright and well-meaning. Also like me, he appears not yet to have had the opportunity to take the measure of his own resources. Fortunately, life is long. When he has assumed ownership of some meaningful failures, Brian will in time find the focus and facility to engineer his own successes. No one can map that path but he.

I hope that I have been able to provide you with useful information. You are certainly welcome to

communicate with me at any time, and I will do my best within the law to address every concern.  
Thank you again for writing.

Yours,

Dr. Smith

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