

University Formal Grievance Form

In alignment with the University of Chicago's enduring commitment to due process, academic integrity, I submit the following Executive Summary, pursuant to the University Grievance Policy for Graduate Students.

Executive Summary

This grievance **strictly addresses procedural misconduct** — not differences in academic evaluation or performance. It addresses serious irregularities and the concentration of authority by the Chair of the Physics Department, Professor Peter Littlewood, which culminated in my administrative dismissal from the PhD program without due process, independent oversight, or the opportunity for review.

I submit this grievance with the sincere hope that it reaches not only the procedural gatekeepers, but the University leadership responsible for upholding the institutional principles of fairness, accountability, and due process. As Provost, you are the last opportunity for reviewing procedural consistency and institutional integrity. I trust that Provost Baicker, in particular, will recognize the systemic implications raised here, and I respectfully request that this submission be brought to her direct attention.

Alleged Abuse of Authority and Absence of Due Process:

- Imposing unilateral academic expectations (submission of a full thesis proposal within one quarter) that were neither documented in my probation letter nor formally agreed upon; and later retroactively framed as formal expectations. Failure to provide clear, documented academic expectations and performance benchmarks during the probation period.
- Executing administrative dismissal solely at the Chair's discretion, without departmental oversight, academic committee review, or consultation of dismissal decision with my academic advisor.
- Contacting my academic advisor regarding research progress, receiving a limited factual observation ("not much progress"), and subsequently interpreting this as sufficient grounds for dismissal — without informing me of the inquiry, consulting the advisor on disciplinary implications, or including him in any stage of the decision-making process. This constitutes selective appropriation of third-party input while excluding both parties from procedural dialogue.
- Providing misleading assurances ("I will try to persuade the Dean to restore you to Good Standing") two days before issuing final dismissal, creating false reliance and impairing my ability to respond in a timely and informed manner.
- Constructively misrepresenting procedural engagement: explicitly promising to review extensive documentation I submitted outlining five years of advising failures, verbally expressing sympathy and encouragement, yet subsequently dismissing me without acknowledging or addressing any of the submitted evidence.
- Not considering evidence of academic effort: affirming my multi-year academic and research efforts repeatedly during meetings, while ultimately disregarding these merits entirely in the dismissal decision.
- Denying any opportunity for appeal, reconsideration, or independent review, consolidating investigatory, adjudicatory, and appellate authority within a single individual. Lack of any opportunity for the student to present evidence, contest the narrative, or seek clarification prior to final action.
- Structural concentration of power, with the same individual acting simultaneously as initiator, adjudicator, and gatekeeper of any potential review. Establishment of a closed administrative loop that eliminated procedural independence and neutral adjudication.
- Using emotional capitulation as procedural closure.

Requested Remedy:

In accordance with the University's stated commitments to procedural fairness, I respectfully request that the Office of the Provost:

1. Conduct a formal review to determine whether the procedural failures and unilateral actions constitute an abuse of authority.
2. Consider appropriate academic remedies, including, but not limited to:

Primary Remedy:

- Immediate reinstatement to active PhD status before withdrawal, subject to the establishment of clear, documented, and reasonable probationary expectations mutually agreed upon by the student, the advisor, and the department.
- The probation plan should include specific, achievable milestones, transparent evaluation criteria; regular faculty mentorship; including faculty-neutral oversight in probation design, to ensure that no single authority determines both expectations and consequences; and independent, fair academic assessments with due process safeguards, including the student's opportunity to respond.

Secondary Remedy (if full reinstatement is deemed impracticable):

- If full reinstatement is impractical, I am willing to consider alternative research affiliation — conditional, time-limited, non-funded — for the purpose of academic closure and to allow my work with my faculty mentor (Professor Ivar Martin) to reach intellectual completion: a supervised, limited-scope research project under faculty mentorship for the purpose of academic closure and continued scholarly engagement;
 - Alternatively, administrative flexibility to enable temporary research affiliation within the University, facilitating transition to alternative academic opportunities;
 - Retroactive reclassification of my administrative withdrawal as a voluntary withdrawal or voluntary separation, thereby preserving academic standing and ensuring an accurate academic record. With official annotation confirming that the departure was voluntary, not a result of disciplinary or academic failure.
3. Recommend the implementation of minimum procedural safeguards for future academic dismissals, including:
 - Clear written probation conditions based on mutual communication and understanding;
 - A minimum checklist of probation tasks co-signed by the student and the faculty advisor;
 - Required advisor consultation and documentation before any dismissal action;
 - Student opportunity to present evidence and respond to proposed adverse action;
 - Independent review by a neutral party prior to final dismissal decisions.

Describe in detail the conduct you are reporting as an abuse of authority. (Required)

Under the University Grievance Policy for Graduate Students, abuse of authority is defined as "the arbitrary or capricious exercise of authority for purposes inconsistent with the University's educational mission."

In this grievance, I respectfully assert these procedure violations:

Arbitrary Exercise of Authority:

- Imposing undocumented and retroactively framed academic expectations (e.g., submission of a full thesis proposal within one quarter) not established in the formal probation letter.
- Setting new probationary expectations mid-course through verbal communication, and subsequently retroactively framing them in writing as previously agreed-upon terms — without mutual understanding or contemporaneous documentation.
- Executing administrative dismissal solely at the Chair's discretion, without consultation of decision with my academic advisor, independent academic review, or departmental oversight mechanisms.
- Interpreting a limited factual comment from my academic advisor ("no proposal submitted") as de facto justification for dismissal — without informing me of the inquiry, consulting the advisor on disciplinary implications, or involving him in any formal decision-making process.
- Issuing final dismissal without providing any prior written warning, opportunity for feedback, clarification, or timely response.
- Consolidating investigatory, adjudicatory, and appellate authority within the same individual (the Chair), thereby eliminating procedural independence and any neutral review process.
- Proceeding with dismissal without convening a departmental committee review or applying any established, transparent evaluation criteria.
- Treating an emotionally distressed, non-procedural email, sent under psychological strain and in a moment of breakdown — as de facto confirmation of withdrawal or acceptance of dismissal, without any formal clarification, process documentation, or confirmation of intent.
- Executing final dismissal within hours of receiving this message, without offering support, consultation, or verification, thereby instrumentalizing emotional collapse as justification for irreversible academic termination.
- Disregarding the absence of any formal procedural step (e.g., signed withdrawal form, written agreement to exit the program, or third-party confirmation) and replacing them with a unilateral interpretation of a vulnerable student's personal message.

Inconsistent with Educational Mission:

- Undermining the principle of shared academic mentorship by soliciting limited factual input from my advisor ("no proposal submitted"), but excluding him from the evaluation or decision process — turning a factual check-in into unilateral justification for dismissal.
- Offering repeated verbal affirmations of the student's research efforts and academic progress during probationary meetings, based on extensive submitted materials, yet entirely disregarding these efforts without acknowledgment or substantive review in the final dismissal decision — undermining principles of fair evaluation, mentorship, and good-faith academic engagement.
- Disregarding five years of academic effort, research contributions, and documented advising failures without substantive review or consideration.

- Neutralizing the student's ability to engage in academic recovery by withholding clear guidance, specific benchmarks, or supportive feedback during the probation period.
- Creating a misleading impression of advocacy and support ("I will try to persuade the Dean") shortly before issuing an abrupt dismissal, undermining trust and eroding good-faith engagement.
- Suppressing academic dialogue and dissent by refusing to address submitted documentation and ignoring both student and advisor input during and after the dismissal process.
- Misinterpreting a student's emotional expression of remorse and distress, and intended as a plea for understanding and reintegration — as a valid procedural trigger for final dismissal, without offering engagement, clarification, or restorative dialogue, thereby violating the institution's duty of care toward students in psychological distress.

These actions, taken together, reflect a sustained pattern of procedural irregularity, arbitrary authority, and a breakdown in the University's commitment to its educational mission. These violations are not isolated incidents, but interconnected practices that cumulatively deprived me of fair evaluation, transparent communication, and meaningful opportunities for academic recovery. They transformed what should have been a pedagogical process into an unaccountable mechanism of exclusion.

The following sections provide a detailed account of the factual background, communications, procedural breakdowns, and their impact on my academic standing. Each point is grounded in evidence and submitted with the intent of facilitating a rigorous, impartial review consistent with the University's publicly affirmed commitments to fairness, due process, and academic integrity.

This grievance reports procedural misconduct and abuse of authority by the Physics Department Chair, Professor Peter Littlewood. His actions reflect not a singular administrative error, but a broader breakdown in institutional safeguards, with implications for due process and academic integrity beyond this individual case.

The harm in this case goes beyond academic consequence; it reveals a structural vulnerability in the University's institutional safeguards. When one individual is able to impose irreversible academic sanctions without oversight or procedural clarity, it raises urgent questions about how power is exercised and who remains accountable.

This grievance concerns a clear instance of abuse of authority, defined by the University as the arbitrary or capricious exercise of authority for purposes inconsistent with its educational mission. I believe the conduct described below squarely meets that definition — not only in its lack of procedural safeguards, but in how it bypassed the University's core commitments to mentorship, academic growth, and the support of graduate scholarship.

Unilateral and Retroactive Expectations

In my case, this manifested as a coordinated series of procedural irregularities and unilateral decisions, carried out solely by the Chair without oversight, documentation, or the opportunity for dialogue or appeal. I was administratively dismissed from the PhD program based entirely on the Chair's discretion, citing an expectation that I submit a full thesis proposal within one academic quarter — an expectation that was neither formally documented, mutually agreed upon, nor grounded in any established departmental policy.

This requirement was absent from the official probation letter issued on December 23, 2024 ([Attachment1_Communication_Timeline, Page 4](#)). It was introduced verbally mid-quarter, and then reframed in

a follow-up email as if it had been previously established. These retroactive conditions were used as the sole basis for my dismissal.

Elimination of Procedural Safeguards

At no point during the probation period was there a departmental committee, academic review, or evaluative oversight — procedures that would normally safeguard against unilateral dismissal. At a research institution where mentorship is a foundational pillar of graduate training, to exclude the academic advisor from a dismissal process not only undermines academic judgment, but violates the basic integrity of student evaluation and support. The fact that such a process proceeded without departmental checks raises concerns that extend well beyond the conduct of any single individual.

My advisor confirmed to me that while he informed the Chair of my current status (i.e., lack of proposal progress), he did not request, recommend, or suggest that I be dismissed. The decision to remove me was therefore not collaborative, but unilaterally interpreted and imposed by the Chair alone.

Misleading Assurances and Withheld Engagement

In our final meeting, I submitted a detailed internal report ([Attachment2_InternalReportPackage_Misconduct_DGS](#)) documenting five years of ongoing breakdowns in academic support and advising and included my academic plan. The report, which includes a detailed timeline, documented misconducts, advising failures, and an academic recovery plan, has since been submitted to the Dean of Students, Ombuds Office, and other relevant university offices. The Chair acknowledged receipt and expressed verbal sympathy, stating that he would “try to persuade the Dean” to restore me to good standing. This created a reasonable expectation that a review was underway and that my input was being considered. However, two days later, I received a formal dismissal letter. The Chair has never acknowledged that report again, nor explained the reversal in tone and decision.

This reversal not only contradicted his verbal assurance, but also appeared calculated to delay my response until the decision became final — a form of cognitive misguidance that eroded good-faith engagement and neutralized any timely institutional check.

Emotional Collapse Used as Procedural Trigger

In the days following my submission of the internal report, I entered a period of acute emotional distress and confusion, struggling to reconcile the contradiction between verbal sympathy and procedural silence. In this state, I sent a deeply emotional and self-critical email ([Attachment1_Communication_Timeline, Page 24](#)) to the Chair and the Dean of Students — not as a formal statement of withdrawal, but as an expression of psychological collapse and an appeal for recognition, understanding, and reintegration.

Within hours of sending this message, I received the formal dismissal letter, with no intermediate communication, clarification, or opportunity for response. No effort was made to determine my actual intent or state of mind. The email — sent under visible psychological strain — appears to have been interpreted as implicit acceptance of dismissal, or used as an administrative cue to finalize the process.

This constitutes a dangerous misuse of procedural discretion, where emotional vulnerability was instrumentalized as tacit consent, bypassing any formal check on the appropriateness, timing, or proportionality of dismissal. It raises serious concerns about the use of psychological capitulation as an expedient trigger for administrative termination.

Suppression of Feedback and Appeal

Following my dismissal, I sent multiple follow-up emails ([Attachment1_Communication_Timeline, Page 18-28](#)) requesting clarification, feedback, and the possibility of further discussion. All of these were met with silence. Even when my advisor reached out to the Chair, the response was vague and noncommittal. I later learned that there was no appeal process unless the Chair himself chose to reopen the case — a structure in which the Chair served simultaneously as initiator, adjudicator, and gatekeeper of any possible review, eliminating procedural independence and leaving no institutional check on the original decision.

It is worth noting that the Chair's dismissal letter arrived just two days after I submitted a **comprehensive internal report** ([Attachment2_InternalReportPackage_Misconduct_DGS](#)) detailing the DGS's sustained patterns of mismanagement. While I do not speculate on motives, the timing may merit procedural attention regarding the handling of dissent and critical documentation within the department.

These issues manifested across several dimensions, collectively constituting a multi-pronged failure of academic governance:

Procedural Manipulation: Verbal expectations retroactively reframed as formal conditions;

Cognitive Misguidance: A promise of support ("persuade the Dean") that created false reassurance;

Narrative Monopoly: Suppression of alternative accounts and disregard of documentation;

Temporal Constraint: Final meeting held two days before dismissal, with no time for meaningful response;

Absence of Academic Support: No guidance, no benchmarks, no meaningful engagement during probation;

Structural Enclosure: No review or appeal path independent of the very person who imposed the sanction;

Together, these six dimensions illustrate not isolated errors but a consolidated pattern of administrative control that left no room for procedural recourse. These actions were not merely examples of poor advising or administrative oversight. Taken together, they reflect a misuse of power that lacked procedural safeguards, bypassed academic mentorship, and directly undermined the University's commitment to transparency, growth, and institutional trust.

If such actions remain unexamined, they risk not only setting a dangerous precedent for opaque student dismissal, but also undermining the credibility of the University's commitment to fairness, academic support, and procedural integrity.

My conduct throughout reflects not avoidance, but continuous efforts to act in good faith under unclear and shifting conditions.

I recognize that the Chair may have intended to fulfill his duties in good faith. He did meet with me, emailed a follow-up, and inquired with my advisor. However, these actions remained procedural in nature and did not include meaningful academic evaluation, collaborative planning, or structural follow-up. The dismissal appears to have been based on minimal engagement interpreted as exhaustive process. Good intentions cannot substitute for due process — especially when the consequences are permanent.

Systemic Organizational Concerns

This case illustrates not only individual misconduct, but a structural blind spot — a closed-loop governance system in which power is consolidated, review is absent, and dissent is procedurally erased, which highlights broader structural vulnerabilities within the department's leadership culture under the current administration.

Over the past three years, a pattern has emerged: the department's governance has increasingly reflected a concentration of authority paired with a performative management style. Professor Zosia Krusberg, as Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), exemplified a bureaucratic approach that prioritized the appearance of procedural compliance over substantive mentorship and academic guidance. Her leadership style emphasized formalistic adherence while suppressing substantive engagement, often shifting responsibility downward while curating an impression of stability upward toward divisional leadership.

Simultaneously, Department Chair Professor Peter Littlewood maintained an outward posture of civility and procedural propriety, while internally centralizing decision-making authority without independent oversight or transparency. His leadership style, marked by bureaucratic detachment and procedural opacity, effectively insulated critical administrative actions from genuine academic review.

The combination of these leadership styles:

- Performative compliance at the mid-level,
- Strategic detachment and bureaucratic opacity at the top,

fostered an environment in which structural accountability deteriorated. During this period, several key faculty members chose to leave the department, a development that further underscores internal disaffection and signals the erosion of collegial trust.

These dynamics, taken together, suggest not isolated lapses, but a deeper institutional drift: away from transparent, mentor-driven academic stewardship, and toward an administrative culture that prioritizes image management and control at the expense of academic integrity and student support. This environment not only diminished student voice and trust but created fertile ground for procedural overreach — as this grievance has documented in detail. This grievance is not just a reflection of one student's experience, but a signal of a deeper systemic vulnerability — one that must be acknowledged if the University is to restore institutional trust and prevent future abuses of process.

If the reason my case is not addressed is because the cost of setting a precedent is too high, then I am willing to pay that cost. Let my case be hard enough, painful enough, complex enough—so that the institution can stop worrying that every student might follow this path. Most won't. But some must.

I am aware that addressing the issues raised in this grievance may be institutionally delicate and carry broader implications. I am willing to engage in an accountability process that includes good-faith dialogue, conditional remedies, and sustained procedural review. I ask not for exceptional treatment, but for the University to recognize the structural failures this case exposes — and to consider what procedural safeguards might be introduced to protect future students from similar opacity.

If this grievance is declined or deferred due to institutional discomfort or precedent concerns, it would signal not procedural neutrality, but structural abdication. The Provost's Office is not merely a policy interpreter — it is the final guarantor of procedural integrity when departmental authority fails to self-correct.

Describe your attempts (if any) to resolve the matter informally. (Required)

Chronology of Informal Resolution Attempts

- 2024.12.13 Received probation notice.
- 2025.1.13 First Meeting with Chair (Peter Littlewood) after probation began; I bring extensive academic and research records; unclear verbal expectations given.
- 2025.3.4 Second Meeting; Chair suggested I take a leave of absence; denied conference funding; no written follow-up or clarification.
- 2025.3.13 Third (Last) Meeting; Submitted extensive internal report on multi-year DGS misconduct; received verbal assurance of support from Chair.
- **2025.3.15 Dismissal letter issued without warning, review, or mention of submitted report.**
- 2025.3-4 Multiple emails sent to Chair requesting clarification; all ignored.
- 2025.3.20 Advisor (Ivar Martin) contacted Chair; received only vague deflective reply.
- 2025.3.26 Online meeting with Dean of Students (Bahareh Lampert); acknowledged and expressed sympathy but stated that she deferred Chair's decision.
- 2025.3.28 Emailed Appeal to Provost Office; redirected to department
- 2025.4.1 Consulted University Ombuds; advised that grievance is justified.
- 2025.4.17 GSU representative filed formal grievance, Chair refused Request For Information (RFI), and redirected message to Grad Student Office.
- 2025.4.22-25 Released internal open letter outlining procedural concerns; no formal response received from Chair or administration.
- 2025.4.26 Submitted intent to file Provost Grievance.
- 2025.5.2 Formally inquired about informal resolution.

From mid-March through April 2025, I undertook a comprehensive series of good-faith efforts to resolve this matter through informal channels — including direct communication, advising structures, institutional offices, and union advocacy. All efforts were either met with silence, deferred without resolution, or revealed the absence of institutional mechanisms for appeal, ultimately necessitating this formal grievance.

1. Outreach to the Chair (March 15–April 2)

After receiving my dismissal letter, I wrote multiple emails to Professor Littlewood respectfully requesting clarification, reconsideration, or the opportunity for discussion. These messages were met with silence. Even when my academic advisor reached out directly to the Chair, the response was vague and noncommittal, offering no substantive engagement with the concerns raised.

My academic advisor, who had previously expressed support for my continued research, was not consulted or even informed prior to my dismissal. This effectively removed the primary academic mentor from participating in a decision that should have been pedagogical, not purely administrative — and in doing so, stripped the process of both academic legitimacy and structural balance.

2. Consultations with Dean of Students & Ombuds Office (March 15–April 2)

In the weeks following the dismissal, I consulted with the Dean of Students and the Ombuds Office. Both offices acknowledged the concerning nature of the process but confirmed that the Chair held unilateral decision-making authority and that there was no built-in mechanism for appeal unless he reopened the case himself. I submitted my internal documentation and timeline to both offices to ensure transparency.

At no point was I presented with a departmental academic review, nor was I invited to participate in any form of structured academic evaluation that is typical of decisions with such significant academic consequence.

In parallel, I contacted Interim University Dean of Students Michael Hayes, requesting either a brief meeting or clarification about any possible institutional pathways for reinstatement — especially given the visa urgency I faced as an international student. Mr. Hayes responded that academic decisions fell entirely under the purview of the department and division, and that his office had no applicable procedures. He did not offer a referral or recommend a formal route, effectively confirming that the University provides no systemic remedy when departmental authority is misused.

3. Online meeting with Dean of Students (Bahareh Lampert) (March 26)

Following my dismissal, I recalled that in our final meeting, the Chair had stated that he would “try to persuade the Dean” to restore me to good standing. Interpreting this as a possible remaining window for reconsideration, I proactively reached out to the Dean of Students and requested a meeting ([Attachment1_Communication_Timeline, Page 29](#)). — fully aware that my status as a withdrawn student might soon remove me from institutional dialogue altogether.

She kindly agreed to meet. In preparation, I submitted a comprehensive packet of materials ([Attachment3_Dean_Meeting_Materials](#)), including a personal statement, research updates, a reflective slide deck, and a detailed context report. These were not emotionally charged appeals, but carefully structured documents that reflected five years of effort, procedural confusion, and commitment to rebuilding trust.

However, beyond the meeting itself — which remained largely neutral in tone — there was no acknowledgment of the specific materials submitted, no substantive feedback, and no follow-up discussion initiated by the Dean or the Chair. My final written letter, submitted with utmost sincerity and full emotional labor, received only a brief thank-you and best wishes. No comment on content. No reference to process. No next steps.

This episode illustrates more than personal disappointment. It reflects how ambiguous verbal assurances (“I’ll try to persuade...””) can generate false hope, pushing students into time-sensitive cycles of effort, documentation, and vulnerability — only to be met with institutional silence after decisions are privately finalized. It is a form of procedural performance: where engagement is offered, but no outcome is possible; where space is opened, but never truly shared.

4. Graduate Students United (GSU) Grievance (April 2–April 18)

A formal grievance was submitted on my behalf by Graduate Students United (GSU), based on the fact that one of the stated grounds for my dismissal was failure to make research progress under an advisor — a requirement that directly implicates academic labor protections under union policy.

In accordance with grievance protocol, the union first submitted a Request for Information (RFI) to both Professor Littlewood and Professor Ivar Martin, seeking any documentation related to my research activities from the previous quarter. Instead of responding directly, the department rerouted the inquiry to the Graduate Student Office, which replied that the dismissal was an “academic matter” and therefore outside GSU’s jurisdiction. This effectively blocked the RFI.

GSU pushed back on this claim, arguing that graduate research and advising constitute forms of academic labor, which are covered under GSU’s protections. Nevertheless, administration refused to engage further or respond to the RFI. Following this impasse, GSU proceeded with filing a grievance, which culminated in a Step 3 grievance meeting with university administrators — including Beth Niestat, Katie Kahal, and Brett Liebsker, on

April 17. GSU presented the timeline, rationale, and supporting evidence. However, administrators declined to respond to the union's claims or to revisit the decision. The meeting concluded without any substantive outcome. Although the union clearly demonstrated the labor-relevant elements of my dismissal, the University maintained its position that the matter was purely academic, effectively closing the case without review of the procedural concerns raised.

5. Direct Appeal to the Provost (March 28)

On March 28, 2025, I sent a formal request for review to Provost Katherine Baicker, outlining my dismissal, research progress, and the institutional ambiguity surrounding appeal procedures. I explicitly asked whether there existed any process for reinstatement based on faculty-supported research continuation. Despite the nature of my request being policy-related and not strictly academic, the response I received came not from the Provost herself, but from Assistant Provost Beth Niestat, who wrote: "The appropriate way to handle academic status situations such as yours is through working with the Dean of Students."

My policy-related questions were not substantively addressed. Instead, I was redirected to an office that had already confirmed it lacked jurisdiction — a circular referral that effectively precluded further inquiry.

6. Public Transparency and Open Letters (April 2, April 22-25)

After exhausting both formal and informal channels, I issued two rounds of open letters: the first on April 2, 2025, addressed to the departmental community and leadership; the second between April 22 and April 25, shared more broadly with faculty across the division, administrative leadership, and members of the wider academic public. The second letter, in particular, outlined the full chronology of events and was accompanied by internal documentation including meeting records, timelines, and procedural analysis. These letters were addressed directly to the Chair, the Dean, the Provost's Office, and relevant faculty, and extended an explicit invitation to engage in transparent, non-adversarial dialogue.

I received no response, not even acknowledgment, from the Chair, divisional leaders, or any administrative official. Departmental operations under Professor Littlewood's leadership continued as if no letters had ever been issued. The absence of any institutional recognition — verbal, written, or procedural, underscored a deeper pattern of procedural erasure and communicative control.

These letters were not confrontational in tone. They were written and distributed in good faith, as a final effort to document, reflect, and invite institutional self-examination. When a carefully documented, transparent, and respectful public appeal is met not with engagement, but with silence across all levels of leadership, formal grievance ceases to be an escalation. It becomes the only remaining avenue of accountability within the institution.

7. Request for Informal Dialogue Opportunity (May 2)

On May 1st, I physically visited departmental offices in search of informal resolution, but was met with no one available in office. I followed with a formal message asking whether any such opportunity remained. The Chair requested to the Dean of Students, and she responded, affirming that the academic decision was final and that no further review would occur. ([Attachment1_Communication_Timeline, Page 34](#)).

These actions confirm that, despite repeated and good-faith efforts, all internal pathways were closed — not by exhaustion, but by design.

8. Final Reflections and Transition to Formal Grievance

Despite my attempts to resolve the issue across every available channel: private, administrative, and public — no substantive engagement ever occurred. What followed was a transition from informal inquiry to necessary formal action.

Across all my efforts — including direct outreach to the Chair, consultations with the Dean of Students, inquiries to the Ombuds Office, a union-supported grievance, and formal outreach to the Provost — I encountered a structural dead-end. Each office redirected responsibility elsewhere, and none engaged with the core procedural questions I raised. This pattern reveals not personal neglect, but a systemic absence of interdepartmental accountability in dismissal cases.

At no point in this process did I receive a substantive engagement with the facts I presented. The combination of silence, procedural deferral, and structural enclosure has left me with no informal channel for recourse.

I also formally recorded my disagreement with the decision's process and basis in a written exchange with the Dean of Students, stating clearly: "This process, from my view, reflects not an academic judgment, but a unilateral administrative action — one that disregarded due process and misrepresented both my efforts and my advisor's position." which was bypassed.

Summary Conclusion

Informal resolution was not only attempted, it was thoroughly and exhaustively pursued across every viable channel. The absence of process, lack of engagement, and refusal to acknowledge core procedural concerns has left no institutional alternative.

Each office I turned to referred the responsibility elsewhere — creating a loop in which no one held procedural accountability. This breakdown was not personal, but systemic.

When every internal mechanism for redress, including respectful public statements, is met not with accountability but with silence, grievance is not a reaction. It becomes the last and only remaining step.

All informal efforts have been exhausted in good faith. In the face of institutional silence and structural enclosure, this grievance is not just appropriate — it is procedurally essential.

I respectfully submit this grievance to the Provost's Office not simply as a matter of personal redress, but as the only remaining mechanism capable of reviewing and addressing structural failures that the academic unit, by design or deference, was unable or unwilling to confront.

Explain why your case cannot be fairly heard within your academic unit. (Required)

A fair review is structurally impossible within the Department of Physics because the individuals responsible for the procedural failures also hold unilateral authority over appeal and oversight. This creates a closed administrative loop — one lacking checks, impartiality, or any internal capacity for self-correction.

The central figure implicated in this grievance, Professor Peter Littlewood, simultaneously served as initiator, adjudicator, and final authority. He issued expectations not included in my formal probation letter, retroactively framed them as binding, and then executed dismissal without consulting my academic advisor, inviting departmental review, or offering any meaningful avenue for appeal. This consolidation of power violates the most basic principle of due process: no one should serve as judge in their own case.

There is no departmental committee for dismissal review, no internal appeal process, and no independent evaluative body within the department. My academic advisor, who supported my continued research, was not consulted prior to my dismissal. Even when the Chair contacted him privately, his limited factual comment (“no proposal submitted”) was unilaterally reinterpreted as grounds for removal — without discussion of disciplinary implications or involvement in the decision. This reveals not just a failure to consult, but a deliberate exclusion of academic judgment in favor of administrative closure.

Similarly, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), Professor Zosia Krusberg, is not a neutral figure in this matter. She played a central role in the advising breakdowns that preceded my probation, including years of inconsistent support, administrative errors, and exclusion from key academic decisions. During moments of acute academic and mental health distress, she offered no referrals, issued an unannounced probation letter, and set vague expectations without feedback or tailored support. These actions disqualify her from serving as a viable post-hoc authority.

Although my original academic concerns stemmed from years of inconsistent advising, the DGS was not a viable route for informal resolution, as her earlier role in my probation contributed to the breakdown in support. The DGS, Professor Zosia Krusberg, whose role would typically serve as a secondary academic authority, was already deeply entangled in the procedural breakdowns that preceded my dismissal — making her neither impartial nor independent, but rather implicated in the very dynamics that led to my academic marginalization.

From my early years in the program, the DGS repeatedly failed to ensure consistent advising or timely support. For instance, she neglected to complete required registration processes for essential coursework, mismanaged communications around degree requirements, and often imposed decisions without consultation. One notable example was the assignment of a time-intensive English course unrelated to my academic needs — which later culminated in a plagiarism accusation that I had no opportunity to contest, and which was never addressed by the DGS despite my protest.

During a period of personal and academic distress, including lab exclusion and mental health challenges, the DGS failed to provide guidance or connect me with resources. Her response was to issue a probation letter without prior discussion, support, or any formal investigation into the circumstances. The expectations laid out in that probation were not tailored to my situation, and the process that followed lacked any mechanism for reevaluation or advisor involvement. Given her direct involvement in the events leading to my probation and dismissal, the DGS cannot reasonably serve as a neutral party in any post-hoc evaluation.

In such a context, no academic figure within the department remains both structurally independent and substantively informed enough to fairly assess the case.

Although the DGS issued the original probation letter, it was I who actively sought out the Chair to request clarification and guidance on how to proceed. What followed was a new set of expectations communicated verbally by the Chair, which later became the sole basis for my dismissal — despite not being reflected in the original probation letter and never being formally documented.

These are not isolated failures of individual judgment, but indicators of a structural incapacity within the department to self-correct when internal processes are compromised. A grievance process cannot function within a unit where the individuals implicated also monopolize the means of review.

Attempts to resolve the matter informally were made repeatedly and in good faith. Yet the department refused to engage with a union-supported grievance, redirected formal requests for information, and failed to acknowledge internal documentation or respectful public appeals. The department has not acknowledged any procedural irregularity, nor expressed willingness to establish safeguards to prevent recurrence. These actions reinforce the structural incapacity of the department to adjudicate conflicts involving its own leadership.

The absence of any meaningful response — even after additional good-faith submissions — further reinforces the conclusion that no independent or restorative mechanism exists within the academic unit or its immediate oversight structure.

Internal correspondence further confirms that Chair Littlewood had discussed my dismissal with Divisional and Provost-level leadership prior to notifying me, presenting the outcome as final. These statements were not exploratory — they were conclusive in tone and intent, foreclosing any possibility of internal remedy.

When I raised concerns in writing — including the lack of documented probation modifications, absence of clear evaluation criteria, and exclusion of my advisor — I was told unequivocally that the decision would not be reconsidered. In one exchange, Chair Littlewood stated:

“I don’t see a path to you achieving a PhD at UChicago,”

...while affirming that the Provost’s Office had been informed and that **“the matter will not be reopened.”**

These statements, made with Vice Provost Ka Yee C. Lee and PSD leadership copied, demonstrate that institutional authorities were aware of procedural deficiencies yet allowed the outcome to proceed without challenge. This further underscores that the academic unit is structurally and institutionally unable to provide a fair forum for review.

On March 26, 2025, I met with Dean of Students Bahareh Lampert and presented a detailed slide deck summarizing my academic progress and the procedural inconsistencies that had compromised my probation. The presentation included documentation of evolving expectations, lack of formal feedback, and new research contributions under my advisor’s supervision. While Dean Lampert expressed sympathy and acknowledged the complexity of the situation, she confirmed that her office had no authority to question or review the Chair’s decision, which she described as a “final academic judgment.” Even when presented with clear procedural irregularities and complete documentation, the administrative response was not inquiry — it was resignation.

Given these structural barriers, only a grievance process conducted by the Office of the Provost — with procedural neutrality and institutional independence — can fairly assess the actions that led to my dismissal and restore trust in academic oversight.

This grievance seeks not only redress for one student, but to examine a structural vulnerability in academic governance — one where concentration of authority allows even well-intentioned individuals to act without oversight, and where students are left without defense when institutional ambiguity is used to deny recourse.

When both the process and its appeal are housed in the same hands, only external review can uphold institutional integrity.

Only a structurally independent review body — such as the Office of the Provost — can credibly assess the layered breakdown of procedural oversight described above, and propose preventive institutional safeguards.

Only the Provost's Office — which exists precisely to safeguard the University's academic integrity beyond departmental interests — is positioned to ensure that such decisions meet the standards of transparency, proportionality, and procedural fairness.

This is not only a case about one student's exclusion — it is about restoring the basic safeguards that prevent academic power from becoming unaccountable.

Share any additional background information that will be beneficial in considering your grievance.

To support this grievance, I offer additional academic and institutional context — including my research trajectory, mentorship history, and the procedural environment in which the dismissal occurred. These details provide insight into how academic merit was disregarded, and how institutional silence compounded the procedural harm.

Research Progress and Advisor Marginalization

Since Winter 2023, I have conducted theoretical research under the supervision of Professor Ivar Martin, transitioning from an experimental background into independent conceptual work. By Spring 2025, we had developed one direction into a draft manuscript, with clear structure, derivations, and numerical results — reflecting progress consistent with the candidacy stage in our field.

Despite this, none of my research contributions were reviewed or acknowledged in the Chair's dismissal decision. My advisor, though academically supportive, was not included in any review or consultation process. As the faculty member most familiar with my work, his exclusion raises serious concerns about whether academic progress played any role in the final decision.

While my academic advisor supported my intellectual development and research contributions, he did not participate in the dismissal process, nor was he consulted in any formal evaluative capacity. His marginalization from academic review further underscores the lack of procedural and pedagogical integrity.

Academic Approach and Communication Style

Throughout my PhD, I developed a structured, self-disciplined approach to research — including time-tracking systems, workflow tools, and conceptual mapping — to meet the demands of theoretical inquiry. My academic strengths lie in pattern recognition, independent learning, and sustained investigation across diverse problems.

However, I rely on institutional clarity to navigate ambiguity. When expectations shift without documentation — or when feedback lacks follow-up — I tend to pause and seek clarification. This is not a sign of disengagement, but an attempt to act responsibly. Unfortunately, this caution was misread not as thoughtfulness, but as defiance or disengagement.

I never sought special accommodation — only the opportunity to work within a framework that values transparency, structure, and mentorship. These should benefit all students, not just the most outspoken or conforming ones.

This makes the absence of structured mentoring and evaluation during probation all the more consequential — and ultimately, irreversible.

Institutional Silence and Exclusion

When a former mentor submitted a letter of support contextualizing my trajectory, it received no acknowledgment. The same silence met other faculty input. This was not administrative overload — it reflected a closed evaluative process designed to resist context and silence complication. Even third-party voices with deep knowledge of my case were procedurally excluded.

This pattern illustrates not personal oversight, but systemic aversion to review. The department did not merely fail to engage dissent — it actively erased it through procedural omission.

Why This Case Matters

What follows is not just an academic grievance, but a structural warning.

This grievance is not simply about the loss of a degree opportunity. It reveals structural vulnerabilities — particularly for students whose paths are interdisciplinary, nonlinear, or stylistically outside administrative norms. In the absence of checks, students who momentarily fall out of sync with undocumented expectations may be subject to irreversible exclusion — with no opportunity for review or response.

I do not ask for reversal as a favor. I ask only that my academic record and context be reviewed fairly — and that no student be removed for failing to match informal expectations, especially without procedural clarity or academic consultation.

I take full responsibility for the parts of my journey that were uncertain or slow-moving. But that responsibility cannot be used to excuse a process that bypassed consultation, ignored merit, and shut down dialogue.

I hope this context demonstrates that the dismissal I experienced was not just procedurally flawed, but misaligned with the University's commitments to academic integrity, mentorship, and responsible governance.

I submit this grievance not to provoke, but to contribute — to the University's own capacity for self-reflection and principled response. I do so in the belief that fair process and institutional courage are essential to the integrity of higher education.

This submission is not made in pursuit of exception, but of accountability — not only to rectify a personal harm, but to restore the University's own promise of fairness, inquiry, and institutional conscience, and to affirm the basic academic principle that students deserve to be evaluated based on the substance of their work, not filtered out by silence or shaped by institutional convenience.

Should the Office of the Provost determine that the actions described constitute an abuse of authority, I respectfully request consideration for academic reinstatement, or an alternative academic remedy that acknowledges the merit of my work and the procedural failures that led to my dismissal.

Specifically, I respectfully request that the Provost's Office consider whether reinstatement, independent academic evaluation, or an alternative completion path (e.g., terminal master's or supervised research completion) is warranted based on the record of academic merit and procedural irregularities outlined above.

While this grievance focuses on the most direct procedural violations associated with my dismissal, it is submitted with the understanding that these actions occurred within a broader institutional pattern of ambiguity, inequity, and procedural silence. I remain willing to provide further materials and contextual records should a more comprehensive review be warranted.

Should further clarification, documentation, or dialogue be desired, I remain available and committed to engaging constructively.

Supporting Documentation

Attachment1_Communication_Timeline

- Communication Timeline (full)
- Original Probation Letter
- Original Dismissal Letter

Attachment2_InternalReportPackage_Misconduct_DGS

- Past Attempts related to DGS
- Time estimation (updated)
- Misbehavior (general)
- Misbehavior (personal)
- Additional
- Timeline
- Request

Attachment3_Dean_Meeting_Materials

- Email Scheduling a meeting
- Meeting with Dean of Students
- ChatHistory-Chair
- ChatHistory-UChicago
- Reflection on Interactions with the Department Chair
- Personal Statement and Advisor Relationship Context
- research progress (recent)
- From Yuxiang to Bahareh
- Supplementary Statement

Attachment4_Open_Letter_Bundle

- openletter2025.4.2
- openletter2025.4.22
- Attachment1_Language_as_Authority_Chair
- Attachment2_Interactions_with_the_Department_Chair
- Attachment3_Communication_Timeline

University Formal Grievance Form (this document)