

Dear all,

Please forgive the abruptness of this message, as I feel I have no choice but to speak out at this moment.

My name is Yuxiang Pei, and I am a fifth-year PhD student who was recently administratively dismissed from the Physics program. This decision was made solely by our current Chair, Professor Peter Littlewood, through a process that left no space for appeal, clarification, or review.

Above all, I want to begin by saying sorry to Peter: I can understand your perspectives and concerns, but I also hope you can understand why I strongly disagree with being dismissed through the process you led. It has come to a point where I have to speak out: there's simply no other option.

I was dismissed for not submitting a thesis proposal within one academic quarter: an expectation that was not formally documented or agreed upon, but verbally communicated under uncertainty. A follow-up email from the Chair introduced additional expectations, including a structured research proposal and timeline, phrased as if they had already been agreed to. But at no point did I explicitly accept these terms, which later became the sole basis for my dismissal.

I didn't submit a proposal — not out of defiance, but because I wasn't ready. My advisor and I had not yet aligned on a direction. I had begun working independently, but I didn't feel confident enough to formalize or present a topic prematurely. It didn't seem honest to force something unformed, just to meet an imposed deadline.

I may have been a variable too complex to be understood or managed easily. I was emotionally overwhelmed, withdrawn, and slow to communicate. That's a pattern I regret. But I also believe that what was interpreted as resistance was, in truth, caution — and perhaps a desperate attempt to keep going.

Dear Peter, I believe you care deeply about students and give generously of your time and experience. I have always respected your work and your presence in this department. But I also hope you can understand how difficult it was for me to meet all the expectations placed on me during that period: I was put to probation for not making sufficient research progress and was asked to find a new advisor. Under this condition, could I settle on a thesis topic while also pushing forward a newly started research project, and completing a class within the same quarter?

Our meetings were difficult. I believe you were affected by my emotional stress, and had to respond quickly, perhaps reflexively, while managing disappointment — because you had high expectations. However, it was too high an expectation for me at that time, especially during probation period: as you saw from my initial response to your email, and from my continued lack of progress, I was not ready for that task.

In our final meeting, I submitted detailed internal reports. You acknowledged them, expressed sympathy, and told me you would support returning me to good standing. But two days later, without warning or follow-up, I received your dismissal letter — issued without a chance to speak, and without my advisor even being informed.

I can understand how this might have looked from your side, too. The action of submitting these materials may have appeared as an attempt to push back, but in reality, it was a final effort to demonstrate my commitment and willingness to resolve the situation. I had hoped the materials would show my perseverance in pursuing the PhD despite the challenges. Unfortunately, it seems that instead of seeing my effort to overcome obstacles, the focus was placed on my being a problematic student who needed to be removed from the program.

This letter is not to place blame. It is to offer my perspective, in an honest way. Thank you for reading.

If anyone is open to speaking further, even informally — I would be grateful for a conversation. Even if no reply comes, I will remain grateful for the years I've spent here, and for all those who cared in their own ways.

Sincerely,
Yuxiang Pei
PhD candidate, 5th year (Administratively Withdrawn), recent MS graduate

Attachments:

- (1) [Chair Meeting Reflection.pdf](#) — a written account of my meetings with Professor Littlewood, originally prepared for internal review, and now shared for transparency.
- (2) [Communication Timeline.pdf](#) — includes a timeline of major events and selected email records showing delayed responses, miscommunication, and procedural ambiguity during my probation and dismissal process.

(I share these documents not to accuse, but to preserve the full picture of how events unfolded — in the hope that they may inform reflection.)