

Case Dossier: Cooper Beaman

Summary of Appeal to the Division of Graduate Education

This appeal is grounded in UCLA policy allowing for appeals based on (a) procedural error and/or (b) non-academic criteria, including failure to provide reasonable accommodation for a documented disability.

Argument 1: Failure to Provide Reasonable Accommodations for ADHD

The central argument is that UCLA/NSIDP failed to meet its legal and ethical obligations under ADA/Section 504. Despite formal awareness of Mr. Beaman's ADHD from his CAE registration, the program did not engage in the required proactive, interactive process to identify and provide necessary programmatic accommodations for the executive-function-intensive demands of lab rotations and mentor securement. Crucially, Mr. Beaman documented his late awareness—**"did not know I could seek accommodations/adjustments to policy [beyond coursework/exams] until just after 5th rotation"**—a critical failure in university guidance that directly prejudiced his ability to succeed and constitutes a significant violation of non-academic criteria for appeal. The CAE's subsequent denial of a disability-based request for an extension on the internal appeal deadline further underscores this failure to accommodate.

Argument 2: Significant, Prejudicial Procedural Errors & Arbitrary Actions

- **Failure of Simultaneous Service & Denial of Rebuttal:** A dispositive procedural error occurred when the NSIDP Chair's response to the appeal (due Aug 8) was not provided to Mr. Beaman. Instead, it was delivered for the first time by DGE on Aug 26, concurrently with the Dean's decision. This violated the **Standards & Procedures** requirement for simultaneous service to "DGE and the individual" and denied Mr. Beaman the fundamental right to review and rebut the program's arguments before a decision was rendered.
- **Shifting Justifications:** The rationale for disqualification was improperly expanded from a single reason ("failure to find a mentor") to three unrelated benchmarks **after** the internal appeal was submitted. This post-hoc justification, which Mr. Beaman noted "feels both retaliatory and an admission of the initial grounds' insufficiency," prejudiced his ability to mount a focused defense.
- **Impossibility of Completion:** A key deliverable for the final rotation required external collaborator feedback which was not received until two months after the rotation ended, making a "Satisfactory" grade procedurally impossible to achieve and invalidating it as a basis for disqualification.
- **Disparate Treatment:** The appeal alleges that other NSIDP students with similar or more significant academic deficiencies were not recommended for disqualification, suggesting

an inconsistent and arbitrary application of program standards.

- **Improper Notification & Communication Breakdown:** The official initiation of the disqualification process was conveyed indirectly and with significant delay by an SAO, contravening principles of direct and timely communication from program leadership.

Case Narrative & Argument Detail

This overview details the sequence of events and procedural failures that form the basis of the DGE appeal.

I. A Competent Student Encounters Systemic Barriers

Cooper Beaman (CB) matriculated with a strong research background. His initial lab rotations were consistently terminated not for lack of skill, but for PI-cited systemic issues of "funding," "space," and "mentorship bandwidth." This process was compounded by significant medical crises (Bell's Palsy, hospitalization) and the challenges of his documented ADHD. Despite this, CB demonstrated academic excellence by passing his WQEs with High Pass marks.

II. A Flawed Academic Plan & The Failure to Accommodate

NSIDP instituted a high-stakes Academic Plan for a fifth rotation. The process was marked by irregularities, including the PI being advised by program leadership to document expectations in writing—a step she noted was unusual:

"I've never done one of these before for a rotation student but Jenny and Felix suggested documenting..."

The central legal failure occurred here: despite awareness of his ADHD, the program did not engage in a proactive, interactive process to provide programmatic accommodations for the mentor search. The university's failure is underscored by CB's own documented statement on March 31, 2025:

"I did not know I could seek accommodations/adjustments to policy [beyond coursework/exams] until just after 5th rotation."

This lapse prevented him from seeking necessary support, constituting a clear violation of ADA/Section 504.

III. Procedural Unraveling & Arbitrary Actions

- **Impossibility of Completion:** The 'Unsatisfactory' grade in the 5th rotation is invalid as a basis for dismissal. A key deliverable submitted to external collaborators on March 9 was not acknowledged until May 6, making it procedurally impossible for CB to have met this benchmark in time.
- **Shifting Justifications:** The initial dismissal letter (Apr 28) cited only "failure to find a faculty mentor." The denial letter (May 30) expanded the rationale to three distinct benchmarks. This post-hoc shift is a classic procedural error that prejudiced the appeal.
- **Disparate Treatment:** The appeal alleges that other NSIDP students with similar or more significant academic deficiencies were not recommended for disqualification, suggesting an inconsistent and arbitrary application of program standards.
- **Inconsistent Standards & PI Confusion:** The PI's own emails reveal confusion about

the program's intent, asking the chair if keeping CB in the program was "still on the table," suggesting that factors beyond academic performance were driving the decision.

IV. The DGE Appeal & Subsequent Procedural Violations

After submitting his appeal to DGE on July 16, 2025, the university's procedural missteps continued. Per UCLA's **Standards & Procedures**, the NSIDP Chair had 15 business days to provide a written response to both DGE and Mr. Beaman. The program failed to meet this deadline. On August 26, DGE transmitted the Dean's decision denying the procedural appeal and, for the first time, provided Mr. Beaman with the Chair's overdue response. This simultaneous delivery is a dispositive procedural error, as it denied him the fundamental opportunity to review and rebut the program's arguments before the Dean rendered a decision. DGE subsequently attempted to prematurely close the procedural query on September 11, which was formally contested by Mr. Beaman on September 30, who submitted a detailed sur-rebuttal and insisted the procedurally flawed appeal remain open for a fair review.

Interactive Event Timeline

A responsive timeline of key events. Pan by dragging, zoom with scroll or pinch. Click any event for details. Use the legend to toggle categories.

Rotation 1: Dr. Wells

- **Rotation Period:** Sep 25, 2023 - Dec 8, 2023
- **Tangible Contributions:** Generated BD Rhapsody single-cell RNA-seq data to conduct a pilot quantitative comparison of hiPSC-derived neural progenitor 'villages' versus conventional culture methods. This work directly built upon two years of prior functional genomics experience.
- **Stated Reason for Not Joining:** Funding and space limitations.

Rotation 2: Dr. Geschwind

- **Rotation Period:** Jan 8, 2024 - Mar 22, 2024
- **Tangible Contributions:** Developed NGN2-inducible, PEmax-expressing HEK293T and iPSC cell lines using retroviral and PiggyBac systems. This work was designed to support prime editing screens for functional validation of neuropsychiatric risk loci.
- **Stated Reason for Not Joining:** Space and mentorship bandwidth limitations.

Rotation 3: Dr. Hernandez

- **Rotation Period:** Apr 1, 2024 - Jun 14, 2024
- **Tangible Contributions:** Successfully executed a multi-stage Genome-Wide Association Study (GWAS) on the ABCD study cohort, identifying genetic variants associated with longitudinal changes in 17 subcortical brain regions. This involved data preparation, execution of GWAS using GCTA-MLMA on the Hoffman2 cluster, and post-GWAS analysis.
- **Stated Reasons for Not Joining:** PI cited "computational inexperience," "communication

challenges," and "underdeveloped expectations."

- **Grievance Event of Record:** The PI relayed comments through the SAO that Mr. Beaman's personality was "misaligned with what she expects from her first graduate student," a subjective and non-academic criterion for assessment.

Rotation 4: Dr. Ophoff

- **Rotation Period:** Jul 1, 2024 - Aug 27, 2024 (Accelerated 7-week rotation)
- **Tangible Contributions:** Analyzed DNA methylation data from the largest existing bipolar disorder cohort to investigate accelerated biological aging. Adapted GrimAge2 source code for compatibility with the dataset and implemented statistical analyses (t-tests, ANCOVA) in R and Python.
- **Stated Reasons for Not Joining:** PI cited concerns about "confidence, commitment, and higher-level thinking skills."
- **Grievance Events of Record:**
 1. The PI's assessment that Mr. Beaman was "incapable of completing a PhD" was relayed through the Program Chair as an objective fact, despite the accelerated 7-week timeline.
 2. Following the rotation, the Program Chair made an inappropriate remark about "internalized self-loathing" as a potential cause for lab placement difficulties.

Rotation 5: Dr. Bearden

- **Rotation Period:** Jan 6, 2025 - Mar 21, 2025
- **Tangible Contributions:** Developed and implemented a comprehensive, multi-stage pre-imputation QC pipeline for NAPLS3 genomic data on the Hoffman2 cluster. Concurrently drafted a novel analytical framework using genomic SEM and GWAS-by-Subtraction to disentangle shared vs. disorder-specific genetic risks.
- **Stated Reasons for Not Joining:** Funding scarcity, compounded by subjective concerns over "time-management, communication and productivity."
- **Grievance Events of Record:**
 1. PI admitted it was "unusual" to be asked by program leadership to put rotation expectations in writing.
 2. PI sent a "shocked" email to the Chair questioning if allowing Mr. Beaman to remain in the program was "still on the table," revealing prejudicial assumptions.

Admission Offer (Feb 20, 2023)

Received official offer of admission to the UCLA NSIDP for Fall 2023, including a full financial support package.

CAE Intake (Feb 5, 2024)

- **Details:** Met with CAE Disability Specialist for an intake appointment regarding his ADHD diagnosis. Provisional accommodations for coursework/exams were approved.
- **Significance:** Establishes the University's formal awareness of the disability and its associated obligations under ADA/Section 504.

Bell's Palsy Diagnosis (Apr 30, 2024)

- **Details:** Diagnosed with Bell's Palsy, a condition causing facial paralysis, which persisted for months and significantly affected well-being and communication during the crucial 3rd and 4th rotations.

Passes WQEs (Sep 3-10, 2024)

- **Details:** Successfully passed all three Written Qualifying Exams with High Pass marks in Molecular (100/100) and Cellular (100/100) Neuroscience. This demonstrates strong mastery of core academic material and counters any narrative of general academic incapacity.

Academic Plan Issued (Nov 19, 2024)

- **Details:** NSIDP issued a formal Academic Plan letter stipulating benchmarks for a fifth rotation, formalizing the high-stakes nature of the subsequent rotation.

Unusual PI Directive (Feb 19, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** Dr. Bearden, the 5th rotation PI, emailed CB to document rotation expectations, stating: **"I've never done one of these before for a rotation student but Jenny and Felix suggested documenting the expectations in writing..."** This suggests a non-standard, program-directed action, pointing to inconsistent application of standards and potential bias.

5th Mentor Declines (Mar 17, 2025)

- **Details:** Dr. Bearden informed CB she would not serve as his primary advisor. CB immediately informed the NSIDP Chair, Prof. Schweizer, of this development and requested a meeting to discuss next steps. No reply was received for over two weeks.

Late Awareness of Accommodations (Mar 31, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** In an email to his new CAE specialist and DGE Case Manager, CB documents his critical lapse in knowledge: **"I did not know I could seek accommodations/adjustments to policy [beyond coursework/exams] until just after 5th rotation"**. This is a cornerstone of the appeal, arguing a systemic failure by the university to ensure he was aware of accommodations for the mentor search process, where his ADHD posed the most significant challenges.

Improper Disqualification Notification (Apr 1, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** SAO Jenny Lee, not the Program Chair, first informed CB of his "status in the program" and the refund policy. In his reply, CB clarifies, **"To clarify, Felix did not inform me of a recommendation for academic disqualification yesterday."** This indirect and premature notification from an SAO is a significant procedural misstep.

Disqualification Rec. #1 (Apr 28, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** NSIDP sent the formal recommendation for academic disqualification. The letter cited a single, sole reason: **"insufficient degree progress based on failure to identify a faculty mentor."** This initial, narrow justification is crucial evidence for the later "shifting justifications" argument.

Delayed Rotation Feedback (May 6, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** The ENIGMA-DTI Genetics Support Team replied to the data CB submitted on March 9 for his rotation project, stating **"apologies for the delayed reply as we are dealing with some staffing changes."** This two-month delay made it procedurally impossible for Dr. Bearden to have fairly assessed "satisfactory completion" of all project requirements by the end of the rotation, invalidating the "Unsatisfactory" grade.

Appeal Denied & Rationale Shifted (May 30, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** NSIDP denied the internal appeal. The denial letter expanded the rationale for disqualification to three benchmarks. This **"shifting justification"** after the appeal was lodged is a key procedural error, as it prejudiced his ability to respond to the specific grounds for his dismissal.

PI Expresses Confusion (Apr 2, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** Dr. Bearden accidentally copied CB on an email to Prof. Schweizer asking: **"...I assume you're not talking about something that would allow him to stay in the NSIDP? or is that still on the table?"** This reveals the PI's own confusion and suggests that decisions about CB's future were being made opaquely and potentially independent of his academic performance.

CAE Denies Extension (May 9, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** In response to CB's request for a disability-based extension on the internal 10-day appeal deadline, CAE stated: **"The CAE is not postponing the Grad Division's administrative processes..."** This response conflates a request for an accommodation for an internal departmental deadline with a formal Grad Division process, representing a failure to engage in the interactive accommodation process for the appeal itself.

Virtual Appeal Technical Issues (May 23, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** CB was blocked from joining the virtual appeal hearing, which started 25 minutes late. Emails from the SAO confirm the issue: "we're going to restart... I'm so sorry about this." and later "My sincere apologies regarding the technical difficulties with zoom. I can only imagine that added to an already stressful situation and I am so very sorry." This technical failure added unnecessary stress and further disrupted an

already fraught procedural process.

Awarded Will Rogers Scholarship (Mar 13, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** CB applied for and was awarded a \$2000 Will Rogers Scholarship to fund executive functions coaching. This proactively sought support mechanism for his ADHD demonstrates his commitment to self-improvement. The timing of the disqualification process prevented him from using this resource during a rotation where it could have been most effective.

Appeal Submitted to DGE (Jul 16, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** A formal appeal was submitted to the Division of Graduate Education, asserting grounds of both procedural error and failure to accommodate a documented disability, officially escalating the case beyond the department.

DGE Confirms Dual-Track Review (Jul 21, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** DGE Policy Coordinator Tom Bailey confirmed the appeal would proceed on two separate tracks: the procedural error appeal would be sent to NSIDP for a response within 15 business days, while the non-discrimination appeal would be "held in abeyance" pending review by the appropriate campus offices (ADA/504, DPO).

Procedural Failure: Late & Concurrent Response (Aug 26, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** A major procedural error occurred. The NSIDP Chair's response, due August 8, was delivered to CB for the first time on this date—concurrently with the Dean's decision on the procedural appeal. This violated the **Standards & Procedures** requirement for simultaneous service to "DGE and the individual," fundamentally denying CB the right to review and rebut the program's arguments before the Dean made a decision.

DGE Attempts Premature Closure (Sep 11, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** Despite the unresolved procedural failure from Aug 26, the DGE Policy Coordinator sent a message stating an intent to "close this query" for the procedural appeal. This represented an attempt to prematurely end a flawed process without providing a remedy for the violation of policy.

Formal Request to Reopen & Submit Sur-Rebuttal (Sep 30, 2025)

- **Details & Significance:** In response to DGE's attempt at premature closure, a formal request was sent insisting the procedurally flawed appeal remain open. A comprehensive sur-rebuttal, addressing the specific legal and factual weaknesses in the NSIDP Chair's late response, was submitted to be entered into the record for a fair and fully informed review by the Dean.