
Introduction: the politics of higher education

Brendan Cantwell, Hamish Coates and Roger King

INTRODUCTION

The politics of higher education is complicated and multidimensional. For instance, it is reasonable to understand ‘the politics of higher education’ as an organizational process by which departmental and administrative decisions are made. Alternatively, ‘the politics of higher education’ includes the demands that students and their families make of individual higher education institutions and systems. Both instances are sprawling in themselves and yet, except for students and academics, do not begin to address important questions of state policy or non-state stakeholders. Then there are political aspects of higher education that result from globalization and internationalization processes, through which regulatory, resource and power relations in higher education extend beyond nation-states.

Higher education is an inherently political activity. With this perspective in mind, this *Handbook* advances politics as a method for understanding higher education. That is, we are referring to the idea of studying the political processes surrounding higher education in a systematic and reasonably objective manner. Some analysts would refer to such a methodology as the ‘political science’ of higher education, and while we would not necessarily quibble with this description, essentially all we are claiming in this book is that our approach is theoretical and empirical, and the chapters are formally rational and well evidenced, wherever possible.

These remarks convey that in this *Handbook* the notion of ‘politics’ is construed widely. In behavioural terms, politics has to do with ‘who gets what, when, how’ (Lasswell, 1950). Institutionally, a political system is ‘any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority’ (Dahl, 1976, p. 4). In this sense, ‘politics’ can happen within any institution, including a higher education sector, or even within essentially private and often intimate associations, such as the family. However, since at least the mid-seventeenth century in Europe, a quite particular institution – the state – has taken responsibility for managing the political process in societies. The study of the politics of higher education is focused especially, although not entirely, on the role of the national state (including sub-national units) and its impact on the institutions and processes of higher education.

In recent times, the notion of the state as a ‘top-down’ legislator, funder and regulator has become attenuated by notions of ‘governance’. The idea of governance brings a new stress on the importance of coordination and bargaining in place of issuing commands. The governing process involves drawing together a wide range of different institutions and groups at many levels of a governing system. The governance of higher education is a particularly complex, even compelling, question because of the relative autonomy traditionally enjoyed by academics and institutions in many places, and because institutions of higher education in the same system often compete with one another. Moreover, although in recent decades higher education has come to be characterized by the norms

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and procedures of transparency, accountability and regulation, it is still regarded by politicians as a very valuable activity in securing the prosperity of a nation's population. Governments have to tread a tricky line in holding higher education to account whilst providing the conditions (and often the funding) for it to flourish.

Furthermore, the complexity of modern society means that in higher education sectors, numerous agencies have to be involved in the governing process. Governing higher education typically is multi-level in that the entities requiring coordination may be found globally, internationally, regionally, nationally, sub-nationally (federal states) and more locally, with the different levels often interpenetrative. In electoral terms, too, higher education actors (faculty staff, students, presidents) may be important voting and pressure group influences.

Moreover, the nature of the coordination or regulatory governance of higher education may cross a spectrum between, at one end, self-regulation, through co-regulation, and with command-and-control (governmental) at the other end. Across many higher education systems, too, has been the rising importance of management in the systems of higher education governance, and the penetration of these by business values and practices. This is matched by an increasing reliance on contracting out responsibilities to non-higher education and often more explicitly private interests.

Above all, despite the increased 'administrative' emphasis on regulation, coordination and governance, the politics of higher education is about trying to choose between competing views and interests in the sectors. Attending to choice, competition, views and interests helps to conceptualize a framing for understanding the politics of higher education.

Figure 0.1 provides a two-by-two matrix for framing the politics of higher education. Politics is understood in two ways. In the first, politics refers to an approach to social analysis through which we can better understand the processes involved in choice and competition among views and interests. Politics also refers to social action in which individuals or groups intervene in the choice and competitive processes that adjudicate among views and interests. These two ways to understand politics interact with at least two different approaches. The first approach draws broadly from the rational choice tradition, whereas the second draws broadly from social theory traditions that are more interested in collectives and structures than individuals and transitions.

Each quadrant in Figure 0.1 captures a permutation of the interaction described above. In the top-left quadrant, the politics of higher education are defined as a category of social analysis informed by rational choice theory. This approach is perhaps the most dominant

	Social analysis		
Rational choice	Policy analysis and evaluation Feasibility studies Administrative theory	Policy analysis and critique Identify policy alternatives State theory	Power and competition
	Interest articulation and lobbying Strategy and negotiation Legislation	Collective action Elite coordination Open and latent conflict	
	Social action		

Figure 0.1 Framing the politics of higher education

in the higher education policy literature, and includes much policy analysis and evaluation, technical reports and feasibility studies, and is often informed by administrative theories of government and organizations. In the top-right quadrant, politics is defined as a category of analysis that attends to power and competition. Policy analysis is again a prominent feature, but with a greater emphasis on critique. Other common examples of work from this quadrant include specification of policy alternatives and efforts to theorize the state, and in this case, state–higher education relations. The two lower quadrants define politics as social (or indeed political) action rather than analysis. Doing politics here refers to ‘real-world’ rather than academic activities. The lower-left quadrant is a basic pluralist model of politics where interests are articulated and defended, alternatives are identified, and groups devise strategies and engage in negotiation with the goal of preferred alternatives prevailing in legislation. Activities in the lower-right quadrant involve the exercise of power through direct coercion, the mobilization of bias, or hegemonic domination. In such models for action, elites coordinate to achieve dominance but may face resistance, resulting in conflict.

Chapters in this *Handbook* reflect each of these broad dimensions of politics, though as an academic endeavour the top-row quadrants are more prominent, although the bottom-row interests are represented to the extent to which they are reported on and to which they overlap with those in the top row (research itself is a form of social action). This *Handbook* draws upon the above notions to examine the ‘politics of higher education’ in a global context, indicating both differences and similarities between and within national systems and actors. The *Handbook*’s interest in politics is not parochial – say, referring to the politics of higher education in Europe or the United States – but is rather secular in its approach to the topic. Most chapters address topics across national systems and geographic regions. When chapters do centre on single countries, they do so as a vehicle for examining a topic rather than for elevating any particular example as singularly authoritative.

BOOK RATIONALE

Of course, the politics of higher education have been written about before. Politics tends to happen in particular times and places. So, what is the justification for a broad-spanning handbook on the topic now?

One reason is that higher education is an increasingly important social sector in many countries, heightening the political salience as systems expand, become more complex and involve a growing number of stakeholders. The basic driver of this expansion is the tendency towards high-participation systems, as the share of young people who participate in higher education has achieved a third or half of age cohorts in many countries (UNESCO, 2017). In turn, a greater number of people are involved in planning, doing and reviewing higher education, including regulators, policy-makers, managers, teachers, students and graduates, and innumerable social and industry stakeholders.

Another reason is that globalization and coincident sector-specific developments such as world university rankings have increased competition among countries, activated policy-maker attention to the sector, and increased international policy borrowing and coordination (Hazelkorn, 2017). Higher education has grown in political relevance in

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many countries (Coates, 2017). Even people without a background or interest in higher education may need to know something of the sector. Directly and indirectly, higher education touches portfolios as diverse as health, national security, tourism and the arts. Given the growing importance of human capital, universities and research are shaping up as new geopolitical fronts.

The political implications of globalization for higher education are at once international and country-specific, demanding broad-based research of the kind achieved in this *Handbook*. As always, the scholarship around the developing politics of higher education aims to illustrate one of the eternal verities of social life: it is about differing views, competing interests and contestation, but within overarching traditions of civility, respect and pluralism. An alternative would be to settle such matters violently, or simply in deference to the powerful. Studying the politics of higher education as a 'scientific enterprise' is one means of securing the former and denying the latter.

A further reason for this study of higher education politics is that higher education is at a point of transition. Following the Cold War, and with the ascendance of what is widely described as a knowledge-based economy, higher education enjoyed broad social status as a source of both skilled labour and knowledge translatable to economic growth and innovation. Increased educational mobility also put higher education at the forefront of global integration processes. Fiscal constraint, austerity agendas and growth in populist nationalism in countries as diverse as the United States, the Philippines, Poland and India may indicate a crossroads for the politics of higher education in specific countries and globally.

It is for these reasons that a *Handbook* on the politics of higher education is relevant. Simply put, it is the right time to take a wide look at what we know about the topic, where the state of the research stands right now, and to consider where it may be going.

HANDBOOK STRUCTURE

These introductory observations make clear that this volume has a large mandate: to cover the politics of higher education. Such handbooks are most useful when they function as a sophisticated entry point for a set of topics, ideas and examples. To generate a diverse set of ideas, the editors sourced contributions from people with varying backgrounds and perspectives. The importance of the topic helped to engage experts from Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific; who are working in universities, consultancies, non-profit organizations as well as the public sector; who are working as politicians, leaders, researchers and advocates; and who span different stages of career. The book harnesses chapters which are designed to stimulate rather than enclose thinking about the politics of higher education. We make no claim to it being comprehensive or exhaustive.

The book can be used in various ways. Readers may use the text to guide their initial forays into a topic or the field. They may also read the *Handbook* as an advanced reference-style text that provides a survey of topics and ideas. In this way one or more chapters may be used to help teach graduate or executive education. The book also provides new theoretical insights and empirical findings, and is intended to be generative of further scholarship. Not everyone with a personal or professional interest in higher education politics is a 'sector-insider', and the *Handbook* has been prepared for a wide

readership, including by people with little or no background (and perhaps no deep or enduring) interest in higher education.

Following this introductory chapter, this *Handbook* is organized into five parts, each consisting of several chapters. The *Handbook* starts with very general matters concerning the nature of higher education and its relationship to the state and society. These contributions are deep and important, for they chart fundamental articulations of how higher education has developed, and where it is heading. The next part focuses on more tangible matters around the geopolitics of higher education, and emergence of new forms of governance. The following parts look at resource allocation and regulation respectively, and the final part charts the nature and interests of various stakeholders.

The five chapters in Part I examine big topics that swirl around how universities relate to the state and to society. Brian Pusser (Chapter 1) delves deep to theorize a model for the ways in which the politics of postsecondary education might be better understood through the application of theories of the state and the civil society. In Chapter 2, Gwilym Croucher and Glyn Davis probe a tension imbedded in policy-making which arises from disharmony over who controls institutions of higher education and who should pay for them. Next, Andrew Boggs and Robin Middlehurst (Chapter 3) take the United Kingdom as a case study to examine university governance and the way universities have engaged with government. Rui Yang (Chapter 4) focuses on Chinese higher education as a means for exploring growth and change in what has become the world's largest higher education system. Chapter 5 by John Brennan rounds out Part I by analysing the politics of social justice and inequality.

Part II includes six chapters focused on the political economy and global governance of higher education. Dirk Van Damme and Marijk Van der Wende (Chapter 6) launch this part by discussing recent and unanticipated changes in the global political context in which higher education operates in the early twenty-first century. In Chapter 7 on global higher education and variegated regionalisms, Susan Robertson examines the rise of supra-national regions and the role that higher education is increasingly playing in constituting regions, on the one hand, and reconstituting higher education, on the other, in different parts of the world. Brendan Cantwell and Adam Grimm (Chapter 8) focus in on the geopolitics of academic science, considering the ways in which academic science may be geopolitical, examining concepts used to understand the geopolitics of science, and describing the contemporary landscape. This theme is continued by Creso Sá and Emma Sabzalieva (Chapter 9), who examine scientific nationalism in a globalizing world, in particular tensions that arise when scientific globalism intersects with scientific nationalism. Christopher Ziguras (Chapter 10) steps back to examine the broader politics of borderless education, unpacking the new stakeholders and dynamics of highly international policy and practice. Angel Calderon (Chapter 11) extends this analysis, looking at how in more internationalized settings universities are responding to competing demands, and how university systems are adapting to trade liberalization, preferential agreements, neoliberalism and market forces.

The planning and allocation of resources is a substantial element of the politics of higher education. The six chapters in Part III focus on planning, finance and associated politics. Benedetto Lepori and Ben Jongbloed (Chapter 12) launch the part by looking at national resource allocation decisions in higher education. They articulate the multiple objectives and dilemmas surrounding the resource allocation decisions in higher

education taken by policy-makers and public authorities. Next, Dieter Dohmen (Chapter 13) continues the analysis of large-scale funding dynamics by reviewing higher education funding in the context of competing demands for government expenditure, providing ideas on how future funding requirements could be met. Two following chapters focus on a financial instrument that has played a growing role in helping governments fund expanding higher education systems. Bruce Chapman and Timothy Hicks (Chapter 14) examine the politics of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. Medhi Krongkaew (Chapter 15) delves deeper and offers an interesting personal account of the political economy of Thailand's Income Contingent and Allowance Loan (TICAL) Scheme. Two final chapters examine broader planning matters. Chapter 16 by Charles Goldman and Diana Carew explores how the workforce shapes planning of degree programmes in the United States. With reference to the Australian context, Alan Pettigrew and Åsa Olsson (Chapter 17) unpack the politics of funding for research and development.

Regulation and quality matters, the focus of Part IV, are basic to the politics of higher education. Roger King (Chapter 18) probes aspects of risk-based regulation in higher education, looking at the application of models imported from other sectors with the intent of releasing entrepreneurial energies and innovation. Elizabeth Halford (Chapter 19) takes a different lens to the same broad concern: the challenge of regulating and understanding quality in an increasingly diverse higher education system. Both of these chapters are framed in the United Kingdom, but in Chapter 20, Dorte Kristoffersen, Susanna Lee and Rob Fearnside zoom out to examine emerging models for the regulation of higher education in Asia. As with the two preceding chapters, this chapter examines the interplay between the changing regulatory approaches and higher education systems. Martin Lodge (Chapter 21) continues the analysis of regulatory politics by outlining an approach for the comparative study of regulatory dynamics in higher education, and by using this approach to offer very brief insights into different trajectories affecting national higher education regulation. The final chapter in Part IV, Chapter 22 by Hamish Coates, S. Umesha Weerakkody, Emeline Jerez, Michael Wells and Stefan Popenici, advances this forecasting work by looking at how the changing political economy of higher education is shaping future forms of market-oriented regulation.

Part V, the final part of this *Handbook*, looks at the politics of stakeholder interests. Higher education intersects with almost every conceivable aspect of society, and as the world develops the sector is playing a larger role in the lives of many people, further engaging their interests. The six chapters that round out the *Handbook* focus on a small sample of the major stakeholders. Martina Vukasovic (Chapter 23) examines stakeholder organizations and multi-level governance of higher education, creating frames for thinking about the nature and significance of different interests, networks and organizations. In Chapter 24, Rosemary Deem looks at the gender politics of higher education. She explores gender politics with respect to academic work, leadership, students and large-scale equality projects. Next, Adrianna Kezar and Tom DePaola (Chapter 25) turn focus onto the politics of academic work, and specifically implications of neoliberalism on faculty roles. Students as well as faculty are obviously core stakeholders. Manja Klemenčič and Bo Yun Park (Chapter 26) review and offer directions for future research on student politics in higher education in different parts of the world. Peter Rohan and Kenneth Moore (Chapter 27) turn analysis in the direction of university and industry collaboration, exploring the landscape in the context of Australia and concluding with

suggestions for improving engagement. The *Handbook* closes with Chapter 28 by Robert Wagenaar, who focuses on the politics of innovation which seeks to put students and their learning at the centre of higher education.

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