

Call for Abstracts

Special issue of
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Students and Politics

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This special issue seeks to explore the relationship between higher education and students' political beliefs and activities. Many scholars have engaged in the discussion on whether higher education (HE) institutions politicise the students who attend them. One body of research has empirically tested claims about HE's liberalising effects (Fryer, 2023; Scott, 2022; Simon, 2022) and found small shifts in individuals' political views during their time in HE. Other studies have highlighted some possible influences exerted by universities (Altbach, 1997; Bennett et al., 2017; Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012; Crossley, 2008) showing that institutions facilitate political behaviour by bringing together a critical mass of people with political interests, and by facilitating encounters with views that differ considerably from one's own. Another body of research has focussed on students' societies and unions arguing that they can play an important role in developing political views and behaviours, but that students' unions have typically shifted away from activism towards a more 'representative' role (Brooks et al., 2015; Loader et al., 2016; Raaper, 2024). However, we still know little about the mechanisms through which such influence may be exerted, or even whether HE is causal at all. Such mechanisms could be, for example, formal teaching and learning or broader campus culture. In addition, more robust conceptualisation of HE's role(s) in informing students' political orientations are needed.

In this context, this special issue will bring a broad focus to the extent to which higher education institutions may foster particular political behaviours, views and knowledges. We are keen to include papers that consider how students' political engagement is understood by other social actors – those working within educational institutions, but also the media, policymakers and politicians. In addition, we are interested in papers exploring conceptual and normative ideas in this area – for example, about whether higher education *should* shape students' values and political behaviour. Such discussions can also be linked to broader questions regarding the perceived value of higher education. Manuscripts unpacking this complex value proposition linked to the political role of higher education are therefore also highly welcomed.

Possible topics for papers can include the following:

- The role of higher education in developing students' political knowledge, behaviour and/or views
- The nature of students' political activity

- The role of students' unions and societies in higher education
- How politicians and/or the media represent students' political activity
- How university lecturers engage with political issues in their teaching and curriculum
- Student protests and campus movements

We welcome abstracts from all career stages, and from all parts of the world.

Submission Instructions

Abstracts should be no longer than 300 words (excluding references) and be accompanied by up to six keywords.

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 1st February 2026 (12:00 GMT)

Successful authors informed: 1st March 2026

Deadline for submission of full papers: 31st August 2026

Full papers are expected to be no more than 8000 words (please refer to the journal website for full papers 'instructions for authors').

All papers will be subject to the usual blind reviewing and refereeing processes.

Please send abstracts and keywords to the guest editors by 1st February 2026.

Email: tom.fryer@manchester.ac.uk. Please put 'Abstract BJSE SI' in the subject.

References

- Altbach, P. (1997) *Student Politics in America: a historical analysis*, New York: Routledge.
- Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., Mohan, G. and Neal, S. (2017) Negotiating the educational spaces of urban multicultural: skills, competencies and college life, *Urban Studies*, 54,10,2305-2321.
- Brooks, R., Byford, K. and Sela, K. (2015) The changing role of students' unions within contemporary higher education, *Journal of Education Policy* 30,2,165-181.
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- Scott, R. (2022) Does university make you more liberal? Estimating the within-individual effects of higher education on political values, *Electoral Studies* (advance online access).
- Simon, E. (2022) Demystifying the link between higher education and liberal values: A within-sibship analysis of British individuals' attitudes from 1994-2020, *British Journal of Sociology* (advance online access).