

RETHINKING THE GEOPOLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

University College London, Monday, 25th March 2024
IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, 20 Bedford Way, London
WC1H 0AL

CALL FOR PAPERS

Scholarship on the geopolitics of higher education (HE) explores how national HE sectors and individual HE institutions are both subject to, and actors within, geopolitical dynamics. In large part this is because these institutions are 'deeply embedded in the social fabric of individual states' and yet also play significant roles globally, making them part of a new geopolitical landscape (Moscowitz and Sabzalieva, 2023, p.150). Research shows how HE actors have been used by national governments to exert geopolitical influence (e.g. Gallarotti, 2022), but also exert geopolitical influence of their own. Examples include French and American missionary universities (eg Bertelsen 2020), global rankings (Shahjahan and Morgan, 2016) and European university alliances (Marques and Graf 2023).

This conference builds on the extant literature to rethink the relationship between higher education and geopolitics in relation to three specific themes:

1. **Capacity building?** Many initiatives in higher education are intended to build not only the institutional 'capacity' of universities, but also to promote economic and social capacity locally, nationally, regionally, and sometimes internationally. We will draw on specific examples (e.g. the provision of scholarships and training) to consider the efficacy of such initiatives and the ways in which they are informed by, but can also serve to shape, geopolitical relationships.
2. **Partnerships?** We will explore collaborative partnerships between a variety of different actors including higher education institutions, national governments, regional bodies, national and international funding agencies, international organisations and private sector bodies. We will consider the power dynamics embedded in such relationships, and the extent to which they bring about change, and/or serve to reinscribe existing inequalities.
3. **Conceptualising (cross-)regional spaces.** We will examine the nature of particular regional higher education spaces (e.g. the European Higher Education Area, Eurasian, Central Asian), the spatial imaginaries that are brought into play in relation to these, and how regional borders and boundaries are established and maintained. We will also discuss the geopolitics entangled in cross-regional higher education spaces and flows, such as Africa-China academic mobilities.

We invite papers on these three themes. Please send your paper title, abstract (in an attached document), and a short biography to L.rensimer@ucl.ac.uk by **29th January 2024**. Abstracts should be no longer than 250 words, and make clear which of the three themes (capacity building, partnerships, or conceptualising regional spaces) your work addresses. We are particularly keen to include postgraduate researchers and other early career researchers as speakers in the event. If you are selected to present your paper, and will be travelling to London from within Europe, we may be able to cover or contribute to your travel costs (second class train fare). Please indicate in your email where you will be travelling from and if you have any other requirements we can accommodate.

The conference is organised as part of the ESRC-funded Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE), by Tristan McCowan and Lee Rensimer (UCL), Maia Chankseliani and David Mills (University of Oxford) and Rachel Brooks (University of Surrey). The event will include contributions from their [CGHE-funded](#) research on the geopolitics of supranational higher education.