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# The Neoliberal Arts

Exploring Neoliberal Reform Implications for Liberal Arts  
Enrolments in New Zealand Universities.

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## Abstract

As a result of various social and economic factors the tertiary education sector in New Zealand (as well as a number of other developed countries) experienced dramatic changes during the 1980s and 1990s. Neoliberal regimes advocated changes in higher education policy in order to decrease state resourcing and to align universities towards providing greater economic gains. During the 1990s and early 2000s a number of prominent critics argued that a natural consequence of these changes would be a decrease in enrolments in subjects that were seen to be non-vocational. In particular enrolments in subjects within the 'liberal arts' were felt to be at threat during the first decade of the new millennium as it was felt that students would employ neoliberal notions of economic rationalism in their selection of higher education, and opt for profitable vocational forms of higher education. By collecting, codifying, and analysing all enrolment figures for both Massey University, and for all universities across New Zealand, for the years 2001 to 2010 it was possible to determine whether liberal arts enrolments experienced a decline within Massey University and New Zealand. The results of this analysis showed that at the national level there is a slight incline in liberal arts subject enrolments as a percentage of overall enrolments, while the Massey data shows a greater incline. The counter-intuitive increase in expressly non-vocational enrolments is attributed to flaws in the argument that liberal arts enrolments would decrease as a result of the increasing entrepreneurial tendencies of students, and the continuing predilection of students to plan their course of study around personal interest, and not vocational aspiration.

# Acknowledgements

For my mum, Jennifer Malcolm.

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