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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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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The past 30 years has seen the emergence and increasing popularity of a new form of political ideology and discourse in a number of English speaking countries. The emergence of neoliberal ideology has had profound implications for how governments operate, and how social services are viewed and delivered. While there are myriad understandings regarding the exact nature of neoliberalism, the notion that this powerful discourse exists and is exercised through governmental policy is uncontroversial. What is less well known are the effects of neoliberalism. The public university system of New Zealand is a prime target for the effects of neoliberal reform. As public universities are resourced by the government, and the government largely dictates how public universities operate, a number of critics felt that the university has experienced, and will continue to experience, detrimental effects as a direct result of neoliberal policy. The notion that the liberal arts, the non-vocational humanist body of study which considers social and cultural elements, would decline as a result of the advancement of neoliberal ideologies and policies is a belief that is prevalent in literature regarding the university during neoliberal reform.

Critics of neoliberalism argue that a fundamental aspect of neoliberal ideology is the advancement of economic rationalism as a means for decision making. As students choose their university study this economic rationalism, and the increased tuition that students pay as a result of neoliberal policies, students will opt for vocational forms of education over the non-expressly vocational study afforded by liberal arts subjects. However, while this is a popular sentiment, there is a dearth of empirical evidence regarding the effect that neoliberal ideology has had on liberal arts enrolments (Berube, 2011).

The objective of this research is to explore what effects neoliberal reform has had on liberal arts enrolments in New Zealand for the years 2001 to 2010. In order to determine whether the policies of successive neoliberal influenced governments have had an effect on the liberal arts

enrolments of students this thesis examines all enrolments from Massey University, in Palmerston North, Wellington, and Albany, and the national database of all university enrolments in New Zealand for the years 2001 to 2010. The analysis of this data will determine whether liberal arts enrolments have seen a decline over this period.

This chapter begins by describing the historical and contextual elements which have been influential for the New Zealand tertiary sector. In particular the evident shift towards the application of neoliberal ideologies in the operation of universities, followed by a discussion on the emergence and development of what we have come to understand as the liberal arts in the contemporary New Zealand University. This chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining thesis structure.

## 1.2 New Zealand Neoliberal Reform

The *1997 OECD Thematic Review of the First Years of Tertiary Education: New Zealand* begins its discussion with the note; Within the OECD membership, it is difficult to identify a country, unless it be the United Kingdom, which has during the past decade embarked upon such a sustained and radical reform agenda as New Zealand (p.3). As a result of economic crises in the 1970s, the Fourth Labour Government, elected in 1984, embarked on a rigorous programme of restructuring economic, social, and educational policies (Olssen, 2002). Within the government Keynesian notions of welfarism, protectionism, and market interventionism were rapidly replaced by an ideological perspective which we refer to as ‘neoliberalism’ (Berg & Roche, 1997).

Neoliberalism is primarily predicated on the beliefs of the ‘self-interested individual’; individuals as economically interested rational subjects with the capacity to best judge their own interests and needs, an adherence to the ‘invisible hand theory’; the belief that the uncoordinated self-interest of individuals results in the overall harmony of societies, ‘free market economics’; the notion that the market is the most efficient mechanism for the

allocation of resources and opportunities, and a commitment to 'laissez-faire' economic policy; that the market is a self-correcting and regulating mechanism, the running of which should not be interfered with by governmental intervention (Codd, 2002; Olssen, 2002).

As neoliberal ideologies gained prominence in the governments of developed countries, the United States and United Kingdom especially (Berg & Roche, 1997), a number of reforms aimed at decreasing the cost and increasing the efficiency of public services occurred. The tertiary education sector in particular became a prime target for neoliberal policies. Prior to neoliberal reform university education had been publically funded for New Zealand citizens. However as the university numbers increased rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s the cost of funding the university system increased apace. The increasing cost of funding university education coupled with the emergence of a neoliberal ideology which viewed tertiary education as a private investment offering a private return resulted in substantial changes to the resourcing of university study (Berg & Roche, 1997).

Of interest in this research is how these policy changes have affected the body of study referred to as the liberal arts. As will be discussed in detail, the perceived function of higher education underwent a number of changes as a result of neoliberal reform. During the 1950s the function of university study in policy documents was variously seen to be economic, social, and cultural. While university study helped to provide skills and credentials to students in order to prosper vocationally, an emphasis on the intangible qualities of higher education was evident in discussions regarding university study. After the reforms of the 1980s governmental policy documents increasingly situated university study as an economic activity, with economic returns.

As a result of the increasing emphasis on the economic ends of university study, governmental strategies were directed towards promoting vocational training for students in order to supply industry and commercial groups with a workforce. The humanities<sup>1</sup> and liberal arts, defined in part through a lack of a specifically vocational element, were seen to be at risk as a result of these policy directions (Readings, 1996; Skolnik, 1998). Also possibly affecting the liberal arts was the notion of an emergent 'entrepreneurial student'. A feature of neoliberalism is that it advocates a particular subject position; the responsabilised, egoistic, economic rationalist actor (Rose, 1999). As the first generation to be born under the auspices of neoliberal governance it is argued that members of the current generation have been

inculcated into this subject position, and will subsequently opt for profitable vocational university education over an education based on liberal arts subjects (Giroux, 2002; Roberts, 1999).

### 1.3 The Development of the Liberal Arts

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a liberal arts education consists of the study of non-vocational, non-scientific areas related to the human condition. To receive a liberal arts education is not to be trained for one specific vocation, but to acquire the abilities of critical thinking, gain social, cultural and civic awareness, learn to communicate effectively, and develop those powers which can be turned to any intellectual endeavour. For millennia this body of study has been an integral part of higher education, and has helped shape the course of Western civilisation (Haney, 1998). However, in relatively recent times the future of the liberal arts has been called into question. Over the past three decades fears for the liberal arts within universities have become increasingly common (Epstein, 2012). The notion that the liberal arts are in danger of being abandoned in a changing world has become prevalent in both the media, and in scholarly literature. Outside of the university the news media repeatedly asks whether subjects in the humanities and liberal arts can be sustained in tough economic times (Berube, 2011). Inside the university academics ponder the imminent decline of the liberal arts and present strategies to counter this trend, and argue who is most to blame for the decline (Berube, 2002; Giroux, 2002; Roberts, 1999). I begin by briefly looking at the development of the liberal arts from its inception to the present day.

The liberal arts have been a fundamental part of higher education long before the establishment of the first European universities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In both classical Greece and Rome the liberal arts referred to those areas of knowledge that free citizens were expected to master in order to engage in civic and political life (Patterson, 1997). Consisting of study of the *Trivium*, or verbal arts; grammar, rhetoric, and logic and the *Quadrivium*, or numeric arts; arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, this body of knowledge was felt to contain everything required for a prudent, moral, and responsible life (Burke, 1985). When

the first European universities were established in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century the notion of a liberal arts curriculum was revived. A common feature of medieval universities was that they consisted of, or were based around, four main faculties; art, law, medicine, and theology. Typically a preparatory course of study in the liberal arts lasting around four years was required before a student could progress to the other vocational fields of study.

In the mid-sixteenth century European universities began to see the beginnings of what we refer to as the liberal arts today as the humanist and the neoclassical movements gained intellectual prominence within European universities. The humanist movement originally emerged tangentially from the study of law and its emphasis on rhetoric, Roman and Greek philosophy, and the critical analysis of texts. Primarily concerned with the human subject and not the divine, humanism was fundamentally secular. Prior to the popularization of the humanist movement scholasticism had been the dominant epistemological framework employed within European universities. The scholastic model of higher education had been based on a model of learning adopted from theological study by monks and as such was heavily influenced by the church. Under the scholastic method reason and logic were subordinate to biblical scripture as the ultimate authority (Scott, 2006). Inherent in humanist pedagogy was the then radical belief that reason, and not religious doctrine, was the highest possible authority for making propositions and determining the validity of propositions. Humanist thought and pedagogy constituted a major break with the then dominant highly religious scholastic model of higher education which had been heavily influenced by the church. Humanist philosophy challenged and ultimately superseded the heavily dogmatic scholastic philosophies inherent in European universities (Burke, 1985; Patterson, 1997)

Humanist education also differed in its function. The primary function of the medieval scholastic university had long been associated with specific professional and vocational ends: almost exclusively in law, medicine, and theology (Scott, 2006). Humanist education offered the ability to further ones social ambitions, as well as ones vocational interests. New and fashionable programs of study such as Greek and Roman literature, Hebrew, poetry, oratory and history were seen as a “passport to the much-desired honorific status of gentleman” (Patterson, 1997, p. 106). Where the medieval university had existed to teach a small handful of specific vocations, between the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries a university education was

increasingly required to obtain white collar employment, and to advance ones ambitions and status.

The university, much in the shape as we know it today, emerged at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Emerging from a period of intense inter- and intra- national hostility throughout Europe, enthusiasm for higher education was rekindled. The University of Berlin, founded in 1810, would serve as the model for European, and ultimately global, universities (Scott, 2006). Humboldt founded the University of Berlin on a number of ideals which became increasingly popular throughout European universities until they were seen as integral for the process of higher education; Humboldt's concepts of *lernfreiheit*, *lehrfreiheit*, and *bildung* especially (Bahti, 1987). *Lernfreiheit* referred to the freedom of the student to choose their own subjects, choose where they studied, and live independently of the university. *Lehrfreiheit* referred to the freedom (barring freedom of political expression) of the professoriat to choose their own subjects for teaching and research, and to investigate these subjects without external interference or control. *Bildung* refers to the goal of education. Rather than being vocational or for other instrumental mean, such as gaining status, education was seen as a life-long process of spiritual and intellectual self-improvement which was its own reward. These notions formed the basis of what we understand a liberal arts education to be today (Bahti, 1987; Burke, 1985).

A tension between the economic functions of university education and the non-economic functions of university education became increasingly evident throughout European universities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the industrial revolution, university education in Europe had been largely concerned with providing the children of landed gentry with an adequate stock of cultural capital in order to participate effectively in polite society (Scott, 2006). With the industrial revolution, universities were framed as providing a technically skilled workforce, and producing original research in order to drive industry. This was especially true in Britain where a number of civic universities were founded in densely populated areas to serve the burgeoning industrial sector (Bahti, 1987). During this age of industrial expansion universities across Europe were more geared towards meeting vocational and commercial needs. In Britain the civic universities which were founded to support local industry lead a new wave in technical education. The British government, worried that local industry was falling behind its continental competitors, encouraged greater emphasis on

technical pursuits, while the industrial sector readily resourced higher technical education through scholarships, grants for laboratories, funding of exhibitions, and prizes for innovations. This emphasis on technical education came at the expense of humanist education which was seen as irrelevant for meeting the needs of industry. In 1876 a critic of the swing towards technical education in Britain argued;

It is no part of the proper business of a university to be a professional school. Universities are not to fit men for some special mode of gaining a livelihood; their object is not to teach law or divinity, banking or engineering, but to cultivate the mind and form the intelligence (Patterson, 1997, p. 179).

While proponents of this swing towards technical education criticized universities for still teaching what was felt to be an antiquated and redundant humanist curriculum. This sentiment was summed up by Minister of Parliament Lyon Playfair in 1852;

Classical Literature and exact Science are wholly antithetic. If classical literature be sufficient to construct your spinning-jennies and bleach your cottons, your system of instruction is right; but if you are to be braced, and your sinews strengthened, for a hard struggle of industry, is it wise that you should devour poetry, while your competitors eat that which forms the muscles and gives vigour to the sinews? (Patterson, 1997, p. 179).

This early tension between the economic and non-economic functions of university education would be echoed through the latter part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century the university was an established and integral aspect of industrialized society. Exportation of the university model from Western Europe, especially Britain and Germany, to the rest of the world meant that the structure of a university in Tokyo was similar to a university in the Caribbean, or Antipodes, or North America (Bahti, 1987).

After the Second World War university enrolments across Europe, the Americas, and Antipodes experienced phenomenal growth. This was due to a number of factors. Demobilised servicemen in some countries were given the opportunity to retool through higher education in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. For example, in the United States 2.25 million returning servicemen were supported to attend



university (Patterson, 1997). The increasing ideological influence of communism and socialism in Western countries meant that a greater proportion of people from lower socio economic status backgrounds demanded the economic and cultural opportunities provided by tertiary education. Governments realising that economic reconstruction and technological development required a highly skilled workforce increased financial aid to students who in lacking private means would not have gone on to study at universities (Bahti, 1987; Burke, 1985).

The massification of university education had a profound effect on enrolments numbers globally in the decades following the Second World War. Enrolments in West German universities and polytechnics went from 150,000 in 1950 to 906,000 in 1978, in France 79,000 in 1939 to 598,000 in 1968, in the United States 1,000,000 in 1930, to 12,100,000 in 1980, New Zealand saw an increase from 7,000 in 1945, to 58,000 by 1984. This growth was not limited to the West. Cuba's enrolments went from 15,000 in 1956, to 244,000 in 1984. In the seven years between 1965 and 1972 Brazils enrolments rose over 640% from 155,000 to over a million, India from 225,000 in 1946, to 2,700,000 in 1976 (Patterson, 1997). Ironically the myriad restructurings and 'crises' of the university system which would occur throughout many Western nations during the 1980s and 1990s did not occur as a result of falling enrolments and a decline in universities importance; but rather in part as a result of the massive increase in both the numbers attending universities, and the increasing importance the university was playing in contemporary Western society (Patterson, 1997).

Fears for the future of the liberal arts and humanities<sup>1</sup> are of perennial concern to those academics engaged in those areas (Skolnik, 1998). However, the past 30 years has seen substantial changes to both the operation and the understanding of the university in many

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<sup>1</sup> While the terms Humanities and Liberal Arts are not necessarily interchangeable, it is generally agreed that the body of subjects known as the Humanities constitutes a fundamental component of the Liberal Arts, and therefore issues affecting the Humanities can be said to affect the wider Liberal Arts (Solow, 2002). As there is no generally agreed upon formal definition for what constitutes the Liberal Arts I will employ the common understanding that it consists of a body of humanist orientated disciplines comprised of subjects from the humanities, arts, and social sciences (Moran, 2010). The rationale for this definition and limitations arising from the use of this definition are discussed in the methods section.

English speaking countries. While many of these changes have occurred due to material factors, such as the increasing numbers of students and decreasing state support for providing university education, these changes are also attributed to the emergence of neoliberalism. The rise of a new strain of political thought referred to as neoliberalism challenged the traditional role and function of the university. Where a function of the university had been popularly seen as providing non-instrumental, humanist education for the sake of social and personal development, neoliberal ideology positioned the function of higher education as providing vocational skills for industry and commerce according to a free market philosophy (Berg & Roche, 1997; Olssen, 2002). For critics this discursive shift would have profound implications for the liberal arts (Berg & Roche, 1997).

#### 1.4 Thesis Outline

While this chapter has laid out the thesis project and provided contextual understandings for critical aspects of this thesis, I begin my research in Chapter 2: Neoliberal Reform in New Zealand Universities by examining tertiary education policy documents from New Zealand between 1925 and 2007. In these policy documents a clear shift can be observed in the perceived function of the university by the state as neoliberal ideologies became more prominent in these documents the function of the university became increasingly situated as purely economic. In Chapter Three: Literature Review I outline the body of literature on the topic of changes to the university and liberal arts as a result of reform and consider both the nature of the arguments made and the evidence for them. In Chapter Four: Methodology I discuss the quantitative methodology which I employ to determine whether liberal arts enrolments have seen substantial changes between the 2001 to 2010 period. I present the results of this analysis in Chapter Five: Results, and I end this paper by discussing my findings in Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion.

## Chapter Two: Neoliberal Reform in New Zealand Universities.

### 2.1 Introduction

The New Zealand tertiary sector has been a site of extensive reform since the mid-1980s. Due to a number of economic factors in the mid-1970s a fiscal crisis occurred in New Zealand in the early 1980s which paved the way for a raft of neoliberal reforms by the Fourth Labour government which came to office in 1984 (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998). Following in the political footsteps of Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom the New Zealand government introduced a number of reforms aimed at economic and social policy. Where neoliberal influenced policy was introduced piecemeal in the United States and United Kingdom, New Zealand's experiment with neoliberalism involved a conscious and direct application of a clearly delineated theoretical model (Larner, 2000). In governmental policy this involved a pronounced shift from Keynesian welfarism orientated political thought to an agenda favouring, amongst other things, the free market operation of state services (Larner, 2000; Olssen, 2002). The restructuring that occurred as a result of the prominence of neoliberal thought in the New Zealand government took the shape of deregulation of financial markets, reform of labour markets, the implementation of a business model for the public sector, and the corporatization, commercialization, and privatisation of government agencies and services (Berg & Roche, 1997; Olssen, 2002).

As a result of a number of factors the university system became a prime target for reforms. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s student numbers in universities increased rapidly as a wider demographic range demanded access to university education, and a necessity for university study for greater access to employment became the norm. This resulted in an attendant increase in the cost of financing public university education (Callister, Newell, Perry, Scott, 2006). Coupled with this material factor, neoliberal ideology posits university education as a private investment, which leads to private economic returns. As such neoliberal ideology resents the public funding of university education. The neoliberal notion of the functions of

university education is not concerned with the public benefits afforded by having a well-educated citizenry (Codd, 2002).

Of particular concern to a number of critics of the reforms to New Zealand universities was an increasing emphasis on operating universities according to principles of economic rationalism (Berg & Roche, 1997; Olssen, 2002). Inherent in the neoliberal ideologies gaining purchase within New Zealand governance during the 1980s was the notion of economic rationalism which is “a form of political rationality in which [...] the market economy is substituted for democratic politics and public planning as the system of production and coordination, and as the origin of social ethics.” (Marginson, 1992, p.1). In terms of governmental policy economic rationalism manifests in attempts to align public sector activities towards free market forms of production and distribution. For universities this involved the contracting out of some services, seeking external funding, the introduction or increase of user charges, and the simulation of markets within the educational sector (Olssen, 2002). This market simulation may take the form of competitive bidding for funds, resourcing by performance and productivity incentives, insecurity of employment, an onus on entrepreneurialism, and the adoption of a corporate structure and mentality (Codd, 2002; Olssen, 2002). The operation of universities, and the framing of university education according to economic rationalist principles, was felt to be especially detrimental to academic staff, students, and the quality of knowledge and research being produced in universities (Codd, 2002).

In this Chapter I begin by looking more generally at the function of university education with particular attention directed toward the liberal arts, and understanding the positioning of this area in New Zealand tertiary institutes. Following on from this, is a more detailed account of influential New Zealand government policy pertaining to the liberal arts, from 1925 through to 2007. The 1925 Report of the Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand is described, as this is an important ground-setting document for the tertiary sector and for policy that would follow in the years to come, followed by The 1959 Parry Report which outlines the then current thinking around tertiary education. A section on Government thinking in relation to the liberal arts, during the years 1925 through 1984 is then provided, as a way to encapsulate the shifting political environment and orientation of this time.

Sub-section 2.7 brings the discussion forward to the emergence of neoliberal ideologies in tertiary education. A number of important briefings, documents and policies are then described: the 1984 and 1987 Treasury Briefings; tertiary education policies during the 1990s; the Business Roundtable and Hawke Reports; the 1994 Todd Task Force; the 1998 White Paper on Tertiary Education; and the Tertiary Education Strategies of 2002/2007 and 2007/2012. The conclusion section summarises these various transitions and pivotal moments for the liberal arts in the tertiary sector of New Zealand from 1925 through to the present.

## 2.2 The Function of University Education and the Liberal Arts

As a result of the increasing prominence of neoliberal ideologies in political thought New Zealand successive governments initiated an extensive tertiary education reform agenda starting in 1984. In material terms the main thrust of these reforms for students was the elimination of free higher education for New Zealand citizens and gradual increases in the proportion paid by the student for a university education. Discursively this period experienced a marked change in how higher education was regarded, and the perceived purposes and functions of higher education; changes which can be observed in policy documents regarding university education between 1925 and 2007. Prior to the reforms of the 1980s the function of university education was seen as providing personal, social, cultural growth as well as providing vocational paths for students, and economic stimulation for the state. From 1984 to 2007 the function of university education was increasingly situated as providing employment qualifications for students, and contributing to the revenue of the state (Codd, 2002; McLaughlin, 2003).

For the body of study referred to as the liberal arts this discursive shift was significant. The defining feature of the liberal arts is that they are concerned with better understanding the human condition, and not with providing training towards specific vocations (Axelrod, 2001; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005). Within the policy documents a shift in how the liberal arts are considered is evident. Initially seen as a fundamental part of the university, the policy documents released shortly after the initiation of neoliberal reform express hostility to

what was seen as a superfluous and elitist waste of taxpayer money. By 2007 the term 'liberal arts' had left policy documents altogether. While the occasional statement was made to the effect that a function of university education is to provide non-economic ends, such as the promotion of egalitarian mores and social and cultural advancement, the strategies of these policy documents were exclusively directed at the economic benefits afforded by university education, and the gearing of university education towards providing explicitly vocational training (Codd, 2002).

### 2.3 Governmental Policy and Liberal Arts in New Zealand Universities: 1925 - 2007

Within New Zealand the government primarily dictates the manner in which public universities operate through the application of policy and allocation of resources (Olssen, 2002). The inclinations and attitudes of various governments towards university education throughout the years can be found in their commissioned reports. Of particular interest in this research is how successive governments have viewed the role of liberal arts within universities. Initially the ethos which drove early government policy in tertiary education consisted of a mixture of respect for the intangible qualities afforded by liberal arts education and of a willingness for tertiary education to contribute to the economic growth of the nation (Berg & Roche, 1997; Codd, 2002). However, governmental attitudes towards higher education have shifted considerably. In 1959 governmental reports define obtaining knowledge for its own sake and increasing delight in life as fundamental functions of university education. By 2007 governmental reports see the function of universities as providing industrial and commercial interests with a suitable workforce.

Rather than consider every government report and policy change on higher education, I have instead focused my attentions on the more prominent and influential reports; especially those written during the myriad of tertiary reforms between 1984 and 2007. Within these reports I am primarily interested in attitudes towards the liberal arts and non-vocational study. I also

pay particular attention to the 1984 and 1987 Treasury reports which signify a pronounced shift towards neoliberal ideology and a demarcation from previous government policy advice towards tertiary education. It is this shift towards neoliberalism which some would argue threatens liberal arts education within New Zealand (Giroux, 2002; Peters, 1999). The nature of the shift can be seen in the transition of how tertiary education is regarded in policy documents, starting with the 1925 *Report of Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand*, where the belief that non-vocational pursuits in tertiary education were highly valued by the state is evident.

## 2.4 The 1925 Report of Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand

In 1925 the '*Report of Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand*' was released. This comprehensive investigation into the state of tertiary education in New Zealand dealt with practically every facet of university education; the role of student representatives in decision making, the academic worthiness of degrees in forestry, even the times during the day that lectures were held were discussed in great detail. Somewhat surprisingly the social function of the university barely warrants a mention.

Regarding the role of humanistic studies (subjects now referred to as liberal arts), the authors of the 1925 report argue that humanist studies serve both egalitarian and utilitarian purposes and as such suitable provisions, such as offering extramural education, should be made to promote these studies. It is argued that one of the functions of the university and of humanist studies in particular, is to educate the governing classes. However 'hand-workers' (those employed in manual labour) do not have the means to attend intramural classes due to either time constraints resulting from full time employment or geographical location: "The great bulk of hand-workers in any community have not been, and cannot go, to the university. If, therefore, university training is to touch them, the university must go to them" (Reichel, & Tate, 1925, p. 86).

As well as promoting egalitarian social mores the authors also argue that humanist studies are also of value to the economy as a whole. In arguing that the working classes should receive humanist tertiary education, especially in literature and history, the authors point to the example of Denmark. The scientific organisation of Denmark's agricultural sector and the resultant economic gains were felt to have occurred as a result of several generations of Denmark's rural adult school providing predominantly humanist education to working class Danes (Reichel, & Tate, 1925). As with the *Report of Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand* the Parry Report of 1959 shows continuing support for the social and cultural benefits of tertiary education.

## 2.5 The 1959 Parry Report

The Parry report, the '*Report of the Committee on New Zealand Universities*', published in 1959 begins its discussion on the New Zealand university with the statement "What role the universities should play in the New Zealand community will depend in large measure upon the kind of society New Zealand wants and is willing to pay for" (Parry, 1959, p. 7). From the outset the Parry Report considers university education as an integral factor in the economic, social, and cultural development of New Zealand. While much of the emphasis of the functions of university education is directed towards economic gains, for example potential advances in secondary industry, the Parry Report also sincerely considers the social and cultural benefits afforded by an investment in tertiary education;

New Zealand should introduce into university studies, or develop to a higher level, more of those subjects which have a direct bearing on New Zealand's own life and problems, which are designed to foster the growth of national self-understanding, and to increase delight in life [...] If New Zealand wants to foster more, and more advanced study of its own life and problems then the universities will have to be equipped to carry out such study, much of it at the more expensive graduate level (Parry, 1959, p.8)



Even during those discussions regarding the economic benefits afforded by vocational courses in tertiary education the authors incorporate the economic and cultural benefits afforded by having a greater proportion of the population educated in liberal arts subjects;

The country will clearly need an increasing number of the engineers, scientists, and technologists, the doctors and dentists, the lawyers and accountants, the teachers and extension workers whom it is the function of the universities to educate. But it will also gain a great deal economically if more use is made in public administration and business management of university graduates in the liberal arts and social sciences. For what is of primary importance in administration and management is the ability to think clearly, to exercise judgment, to express oneself with clarity and precision, and to see one's professional text in the wider context of life. It is these qualities which the study of such subjects as history, philosophy, economics, and literature should foster. [...] In the foregoing paragraphs we have laid primary emphasis upon the contribution that an increasing number of qualified people can make to the economic development of the country. However, we would not like to leave the impression that this is the sole reason why the country should welcome a substantial increase in the number of persons seeking higher education. Although we have emphasised the relationship between higher education and economic development, we by no means think that this is more important than knowledge for its own sake and for increasing delight in life (Parry, 1959, p.17)

Within the Parry Report (1959) university education is framed as providing both economic and non-economic functions. While much of the discussion is concerned with utilising universities in order to develop industries that would benefit the country economically, a sincere appreciation of the intangible qualities of university education is evident in the Parry report (1959). This appreciation, seen in the 1925 *Report of Royal Commission on University Education in New Zealand* and the 1959 *Report of the Committee on New Zealand Universities* existed largely through until the mid-1980s, as the following section outlines.

## 2.6 Governmental attitudes towards the liberal arts 1925 – 1984

Governmental policy towards the resourcing of tertiary education in general, and the liberal arts in particular, in New Zealand remained relatively supportive from the inception of the university in New Zealand in the 1860s to the mid-1980s. Initially a motivation for free tertiary education in New Zealand was the equality of opportunity and personal growth that higher education was seen to provide. Purely economic factors were of significant concern, but seemingly not at the expense of the non-vocational functions that the university provided. This sentiment was captured by the then education minister Peter Fraser in 1939 who argued that,

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever [their] level of academic ability, whether [they] be rich or poor, whether [they] live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which [they are] best fitted and to the fullest extent of [their] powers. (Fraser cited in Treasury, 1987, p.5)

This sentiment remained a core tenet of both governmental policy and popular opinion toward tertiary education until the 1980s (Buttersworth & Buttersworth, 1998). While it might be tempting to consider New Zealand's universities prior to the late 1980s wistfully in many regards, it should be noted that these universities were characterised by elitism, sexism, personal and institutional racism, and chauvinist eurocentric ideologies (Berg & Roche, 1997; Lerner & Le Heron, 2005; McLaughlin, 2003). After the initiation of neoliberal reform these problematic characteristics were somewhat addressed, and replaced by a host of fresh concerns (McLaughlin, 2003).

## 2.7 The Emergence of Neoliberal Ideologies in Education Policy 1984 – 2001.

The 1984 Treasury briefing constituted a marked change in governmental attitude towards tertiary education. Keynesian notions of 'guidance and governance' which had predominated in political thinking and which had served as the ideological basis for an expansive welfare

system were replaced by increasingly popular opposing economic and social beliefs which we refer to as neoliberalism. Inherent in neoliberalism is the notion that collective human well-being and happiness can best be advanced by the application of free markets philosophies, rather than through governmental intervention. According to neoliberal ideology the role of the government is to establish and then protect free markets from external interference. Where free markets do not exist, such as in New Zealand's tertiary sector prior to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, then the governments' job is to establish, and steer these markets towards free market operations (Ollsen, 2002; Thorson & Lie, 2008).

The advocacy of a free market operating style for university education was to be a central theme throughout the post-1984 policy documents. Universities were to be regarded as businesses, academics as managers, students as customers, and education as a commodity to be bought and sold. This market orientation of an institution that had previously held itself outside of a purely economic domain was fiercely critiqued. Many inside of the university argued that the implementation of free market philosophies would erode the civic and democratic function of universities, threaten the autonomy of academic research, and turn higher education into sale of credentials and technical skills for employment (Berg & Roche, 1997; Kelsey, 2002; Ollsen, 2002; Peters, 1999). Key briefings, documents and policies are described in the following sections, which highlight the shift in thinking towards the function of the university, and the place of the liberal arts in tertiary education in New Zealand.

### 2.7.1 The 1984 Treasury Briefing

In its briefing to the incoming Labour government of 1984 the Treasury strongly advocated a neoliberal economic rationalist position. In regards to recommendations regarding resourcing of the tertiary sector the Treasury argued that university education was a private, and not public, good and therefore should not be funded from the public purse:

Strong social policy reasons cannot readily be established for the direct government supply of tertiary services largely free at the point of

consumption. Private education choices at this level are discretionary investment or consumption decisions (that is, tertiary education is more a private than a public good), since the individual users capture most of the benefits of higher education in their own higher lifetime earnings or increased utility. (New Zealand Treasury, 1984, p. 268)

As Berg and Roche (1997) argue the Treasury's use of market orientated speech in the briefing signified a strong shift away from Keynesian economic theory towards neoliberal ideologies based on economic rationalism and consumer choice. This neoliberal ideology situates tertiary education as a commodity or investment to be purchased by individual consumers for individual benefits, and not as a public good to be publicly funded. While no explicit mention is made regarding liberal arts or vocational forms of education in the 1984 briefing, the explicit characterisation of tertiary education as existing solely to provide labour market skills marked a pronounced shift in the perceived function of tertiary education for policy makers (McLaughlin, 2003).

Despite the 1984 Treasury's position on education relatively few significant policy changes were made to the tertiary sector at this time (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998). However the 1987 Treasury education briefing to the incoming government was if anything more strident in advocating a market approach to education in New Zealand and signalled a major shift in governmental policy towards higher education.

### 2.7.2 The 1987 Treasury Briefing

Neoliberal reform within New Zealand universities was highly influenced, and arguably initiated, by the 1987 Treasury briefing to the incoming government (Olssen, 2002). While many of the same arguments were seen in the 1984 briefing, the 1987 Labour government implemented a greater number of policies based on the Treasury's 1987 advice (McLaughlin, 2003).

The 1987 Treasury briefing to the incoming government does not employ the term ‘liberal arts’, but categorises tertiary education as either providing immediate vocational skills, or not. While the attitudes of the authors of this report on non-vocational courses of study are somewhat obfuscated by cryptic managerial and economic jargon, it is clear that the Treasury feels that the primary function of tertiary education is to provide immediate workplace skills, and that the government should not resource (or ‘intervene in’ to employ the report’s language) non-vocational tertiary study.

For the 1987 Treasury the function of tertiary education for the student is threefold. It has a fulfilment function, an integration function, and an economic function. In distinguishing these functions the Treasury distinguishes between education that is felt to provide economic benefit and is therefore good, and education which is superfluous. The fulfilment function of tertiary education is vaguely defined as the ability to meet the personal requirements of those seeking tertiary education;

This may lie in the pursuit of knowledge or wisdom as an end in itself, the traditional image of the scholar, or in the participation and enjoyment of all that the tertiary institution has to offer – perhaps the traditional image of the university student. The first, scholarly, pursuit of fulfilment requires a particular kind and level of ability and this will not be open to, or attractive for, all. (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 162)

The integration function of tertiary education is said to be its ability to allow one to integrate not with wider society as a whole, but with those particular social groups, classes, and niches which the student aspires to belong;

Enabling the individual to integrate with a particular class or group within that society, for example to have the knowledge and style appropriate to a university graduate, to have the norms, values and personal contacts of a [desired group] (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 162)

The economic function of tertiary education is felt to occur by providing labour market skills for employment;

Tertiary courses may be specific, for instance mechanical engineering, or even tailored to a highly specific element within a particular vocation, for example networking of brand X computers; they may be required for a particular vocation, for example accountancy, nursing; they may be directed toward, but neither sufficient nor necessary for, a particular vocation, for example commerce [...] Certification of successful completion of a vocationally specific course is certification of the possession of those particular skills and hence of competence to begin working in that particular type of job (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 163)

While the Treasury does not explicitly refer to those areas of study referred to as the liberal arts, the employment and definition of the three functions of tertiary education allows the reader to make that distinction for themselves. Differing courses of study can be seen to provide differing proportions of the three functions of tertiary education. The ‘fulfilment’ and ‘integration’ functions are presented as superfluous, which by extension implies that non-vocational courses of study are superfluous;

There are potential conflicts between the fulfilment, integration and economic functions. Where the economic function is discharged through highly vocational courses, there may be little importance attached to the fulfilment and integration functions, thus individuals are there to study a particular discipline, for example computing, not to enjoy themselves or learn of, or be recruited into, the mores of some elite (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 163)

The 1987 Treasury briefing is not explicit in arguing that university education should solely be concerned with training future employees with the labour market skills that industry and commerce requires for optimal profit taking. But the characterisation of the non-economic integration and fulfilment functions of the university as useless does indicate this belief;

Tertiary education may be regarded simply as a means of reducing unemployment in itself, filling in time usefully for the unemployed through discharge of the fulfilment, integration and perhaps custodial functions of education - without any particular regard to increasing their employability. Such an approach is, in effect, a paternalistic means of spending money on the unemployed (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 173)

Throughout the briefing the Treasury argues, somewhat cryptically, that the government should not subsidise or otherwise resource those areas of study which are not seen to provide an economic function through vocational training. It is felt that such areas of study are of greater benefit to the students and therefore should be solely financed by those students who choose to partake in study in these areas;

The benefits from the discharge of the fulfilment and integration functions will be largely captured by the individuals educated. It may be argued that society will benefit from more informed, more culturally appreciative individuals but in practice those who feel the benefits are precisely those who are more informed etc. (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p. 165)

As Berg and Roche (1997) note, the 1987 Treasury briefing reduces tertiary education to a purely economic activity: the success of which could be calculated solely in terms of profit and loss. The 1987 Treasury paper is explicit in regards to this position and states;

Education can be analysed in a similar way to any other service in terms of interaction and exchange in the face of uncertainty, information costs, scarcity, interdependence and opportunism [...] education shares the main characteristics of other commodities traded in the market place (New Zealand Treasury, 1987, p.33)

For the 1987 Treasury publically funded university education is, or should be, purely economically instrumental. The notion of *bildung*, learning to promote personal development without vocational concerns, is regarded as not a function of the university and a waste of resources. While no explicit attacks are made on the liberal arts, the briefing does attack expressly non-vocational areas of study: which by definition includes the liberal arts. While the policy directions of the 1980s were of concern to many academics within universities (Berg & Roche, 1997), during the 1990s, the neoliberal free market approach to tertiary education would become further actualised.

### 2.7.3 Tertiary Education Policy in the 1990s and The Business Roundtable and Hawke Reports

With the re-election of the Labour government in late 1987 preparations for a number of extensive reforms to the education sector during the term of the government were put in place under the auspices of the Treasury's position on tertiary education. Compared to the early childhood, primary, and secondary sectors the tertiary sector was relatively unaffected by these reforms. This did not stop a backlash of protest occurring throughout universities in New Zealand where it was felt that the reforms threatened university autonomy in the running of its affairs and were a precursor to privatisation and decreases in funding (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998). These concerns were exasperated by a Business Round Table report in 1988 which recommended that tertiary institutions be corporatized, and ultimately funded through fees, research funds, borrowing, and the sales of goods and services within the university (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998; Roberts, 1999).

Many of the recommendations of the Business Round Table report were echoed in the 1988 Labour government commissioned '*Working Group on Post Compulsory Education and Training*' (known as the Hawke Report). Throughout the paper an emphasis on the private benefits of tertiary education for the student, and the attendant notion that as such students should play a greater role in the resourcing of their course of study was made apparent. The Labour government adopted a number of the recommendations included in the Business Round Table and Hawke Reports and abandoned the policy of free tertiary education in New Zealand and introduced a \$1250 fee for study in the 1990 academic year, to be increased to \$1300 in 1991. Grants to offset this fee were initially made available for financially disadvantaged students (McLaughlin, 2003; Roberts, 1999).

With the election of the National Government in October of 1990 further changes to the tertiary system were made along the lines of the recommendations of the Hawke Report and prior Business Round Table reports. The main thrust of the changes were concerned with introducing a free market philosophy and managerial style in universities and polytechnics,



and the attendant gradual reduction of the state's resourcing of tertiary education (Roberts, 1999). A number of prior Labour tertiary education initiatives which had been in the formative stages were quickly scrapped: in particular a number of programs which targeted tertiary funding towards under-represented groups and the introduction of equity targets in enrolments. In July of 1991 the National government announced the introduction of policy that eliminated the tuition fee subsidy for low income students, introduced a student loan system, began asset testing parents of students less than 25 years of age in regards to student living allowances, and allowed institutions to set their own fees (McLaughlin, 2003; Roberts, 1999).

#### 2.7.4 The 1994 Todd Task Force

Despite the cost of university education to students increasing dramatically in the early 1990s participation in tertiary education continued to increase. The attendant increase in governmental expenditure on tertiary education became a significant concern for the government. As a result the government commissioned a report from a Ministerial Consultative Group to examine the most appropriate balance between governmental and user resourcing of tertiary education, and the economic efficiency of the tertiary sector as a whole (McLaughlin, 2003). The Todd Task Force submitted its report in May 1994 arguing that economic prosperity in 21<sup>st</sup> century New Zealand would require that all New Zealanders possess some form of tertiary education and training. In order to ensure that this occur the taskforce recommended the continuation of a number of existent policies such as the EFTS (equivalent full time student) funding system, the freedom for institutions to set their own fees, and asset testing in regards to student allowances. On the advice of the Todd Task Force the contribution paid by students to enrol in papers increased to around 25% of the total cost (McLaughlin, 2003; Peters & Roberts, 1999). A significant overhauling of the tertiary sector was on the horizon at this time, by way of the 1998 White Paper.

### 2.7.5 The 1998 White Paper on Tertiary Education

In 1998 the Minister of Education for the governing National party Wyatt Creech released the white paper “*Tertiary Education in New Zealand: Policy Directions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998). This Report signalled the government’s intentions to significantly overhaul the tertiary sector within New Zealand, and as critics argued, constituted the actualisation of neo-liberal reform within the university first initiated in the 1984 and 1987 Treasury briefings (Peters and Robert, 1999; Olssen, 2002). While the 1998 White Paper signalled a number of changes to the organisation, management, and financing of tertiary education providers and students, critics were most concerned with the strong shift towards market liberalism hinted at within the Paper. Changes to the funding of institutions and students were seen as evidence of a privatisation agenda (Peters and Roberts, 1999; Kelsey, 2002), and changes to university councils and the granting of new powers to the Ministry of Education were seen to “undermine academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Peters and Roberts, 1999, p. 5).

While the White Paper utilises much of the logic, argument, and language of the 1984 and 1987 Treasury Briefings, what is conspicuously absent are the explicit attacks on non-vocational tertiary education. It is noted that the importance of tertiary education for the employment of students and the economic advancement of the nation is addressed repeatedly throughout the paper, while the social and cultural functions of higher function are not. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998). Non-vocational aspects of university study are discussed, albeit if passingly;

People participate in tertiary education for different purposes, including obtaining qualifications for employment, working at the leading edge in research, or increasing personal knowledge and understanding. The most appropriate approach for academic programmes in tertiary education is 'fitness for purpose'. Quality assurance processes need to acknowledge the wide range of purposes for which tertiary education is sought. (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 21)

Despite its heavy emphasis on vocational education the 1998 paper argues that it is not the role of the government to determine what type of higher education is appropriate for a student and that a prerequisite of any educational resourcing policy is that it “should not bias

students' decisions towards one type of course or institution over others" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998, p.6).

### 2.7.6 The Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/2007

The majority of the changes proposed in the White Paper were shelved as a result of the loss of the general election for the governing National party in 1999. The incoming Labour-Alliance government had campaigned strongly on the issue of tertiary reform and had made promises to move tertiary education away from a competitive marketplace environment (McLaughlin, 2003; Olssen, 2002). The new government established the Tertiary Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) in order to advise strategic policy on long term tertiary development, and to identify immediate weaknesses in the system. Between 2000 and 2001 TEAC released four reports, the result of which comprised the '*Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/2007*' (Tertiary Education Commission, 2002).

While the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/2007* maintained many aspects of the competitive, market orientated model of higher education favoured by the prior government, greater provision was made for a centrally-steered system based on national needs. (Codd, 2002; McLaughlin, 2003). The government quickly introduced a number of policy changes to higher education. Of note interest on student loans was removed for those who remained in the country, university fees were capped, private training establishments were given a number of the same rights as existing universities, and a new performance based research funding system was established (McLaughlin, 2003).

Regarding the liberal arts the '*Tertiary Education Policy 2002/2007*' followed in the same vein as the 1998 White Paper in primarily emphasizing the role of vocational and economically focused higher education, while making occasional statements to the effect that liberal arts education serves the social, cultural, and personal requirements of higher

education. Of the 36 objectives for higher education outlined, two briefly consider the role of the liberal arts in New Zealand universities: both in regards to other matters. The only other mention of liberal arts occurs in a statement regarding research funding:

Universities felt that pure academic research was in danger of being lost to the needs of business and industry. Further, there was concern that liberal arts will lose out to scientific research. Liberal arts in universities were seen to provide many of the identified generic skills (Tertiary Education Commission, 2002, p.69).

For the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/2007* liberal arts are seen as providing ‘generic skills’. Generic skills are defined as “interpersonal skills, adaptability, critical thinking, creative and problem-solving skills, [that] are central to people’s participation in and contribution to a knowledge society” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2002, p.46 ). These generic skills are seen as primarily vocational, to the degree that the nature of these skills should be dictated by commercial interests. An objective for TES 2002 is that “[tertiary] providers will regularly survey local industry groups to determine the generic skills they require” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2002, p.44). Any possible ramifications arising from allowing local industry groups to determine the curriculum of liberal arts degrees according to their own interests is not discussed.

### 2.7.7 The Tertiary Education Strategy 2007/2012

In 2007 the second Tertiary Education Strategy document was released, signalling the intentions of the governing Labour party regarding higher education policy for the years 2007/2012. *The Tertiary Education Strategy 2007/2012* followed the now familiar route of briefly espousing social, cultural, personal, and more recently, environmental benefits of university education while primarily directing strategies at increasing economic gains from higher education. The liberal arts are not discussed at any point within the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007/2012* and the function of university study is seen as fundamentally vocational.

An example of this can be seen in the strategy for creating stronger connections between the tertiary education system and communities. The three areas of focus in this strategy are ‘Connections to improve quality and relevance of education and knowledge’, ‘Connections to improve economic transformation’, and ‘Connections to support social, cultural and environmental outcomes’. The first area of focus, ‘quality and relevance of education to knowledge’ is primarily concerned with ensuring that higher education provides an appropriate workforce for industry;

Educators connecting more effectively with employers in course design and delivery will help ensure that teaching and learning are relevant to employers’ needs and equip students with the broad competencies they need to be productive, adaptable workers in a knowledge economy (Tertiary Education Commission, 2007, p.11)

The second area ‘Connections to improve economic transformation’ is fundamentally concerned with the economic benefits of higher education, while the third area ‘Connections to Support Social, Cultural and Environmental Outcomes’ discusses the noneconomic gains of higher education. It is noted that the first two economically focused areas include specific strategies towards meeting their objective, and have a combined word count in the paper of 568 words. The third area ‘Connections to Support Social, Cultural and Environmental Outcomes’ does not list any specific strategies and amounts to 90 words (Tertiary Education Commission, 2007, p. 10 – 11)

Similarly, the four priority outcomes outlined by the TES 2007 for the years 2007 to 2012 are centred on economic outcomes. These priorities are;

- Increasing educational success for young New Zealanders,
- Increasing literacy and numeracy levels for the workforce,
- Increasing the achievement of advanced trade, technical and professional qualifications to meet regional and industry needs,
- Improving research connections and linkages to create economic opportunities. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2007, p. 30).

The first priority outcome, ‘Increasing educational success for young New Zealanders’, may not initially appear to be economically driven, but we are told that this priority matters because;

Increasing the proportion of young people achieving qualifications at levels four and above will contribute to developing a workforce and society with the ability to meet the challenges of today and the future. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2007, p. 32)

Throughout the *Tertiary Education Strategy: 2007* an emphasis on the economically instrumental functions of university education is apparent. Universities are seen as training grounds to supply employers with qualified workers. Attendantly, students are seen as future employees. The non-economic functions of higher education are mentioned passingly and given the lack of any strategies or commitment for promoting non-economic functions of higher education, insincerely.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Early policy direction in New Zealand regarded universities as serving a number of economic and non-economic functions. A belief in the importance of the non-economic benefits that university education provides underpinned these discussions on high education. The Parry report of 1959 in particular describes a governmental perspective of higher education that was lost during the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and beyond. In regards to the function of the university where the Parry report had repeatedly discussed ‘delight in life’ as a function of university education, policy documents released after the initiation of neoliberal reform in New Zealand dismiss the notion of ‘fulfilment’ as irrelevant compared to the economic functions of the university. After 1987 changes to the rhetoric used in policy documents occurred which softened the explicit attacks on the non-economic functions of university education. Where the 1987 Treasury briefings had explicitly attacked non-vocational education as irrelevant for the needs of the country, later policy documents toned down this position and the benefits of non-vocational university education were discussed; albeit insincerely and passingly. As Berg and Roche (1997) note, the official line was that the state recognises the social benefits of higher education alongside the individual benefits. However this recognition focused on “purely utilitarian and economic rationalisations for public funding of university education” (Berg & Roche, 1997, p. 151)

With the emergence of the ‘knowledge society’ discourse in tertiary education policy documents in the late 1990s and early 2000s the function of university education was further characterised as instrumental (Curzon-Hobson, 2004). Policy was now explicitly geared towards the vocational functions of university education, and the economic benefits which university study afforded socially and personally;

By participating in tertiary education, individuals will acquire skills and abilities that enable them to perform more effectively, hence more productively, within the labour market. Consequently, individuals who gain higher levels of knowledge will contribute indirectly to the competitive prosperity of a knowledge economy and will be rewarded directly by higher levels of personal income (Codd, 2002, p. 37)

The 2002 and 2007 tertiary education policy documents are devoid of explicit criticism of non-vocational higher education, and a certain level of lip service is paid to the cultural and social functions afforded by non-vocational study. This was not so much an alternative to neoliberal discourse in policy documents, but a rhetorical appeal to social democratic discourses framed within an underlying neoliberal context (Codd, 2002). Despite the occasional statements to the effect that university education serves various non-economic functions, the overwhelming focus on, and direction of strategy towards, economic ends is apparent. The function of the university, and higher education in general, is seen to provide skilled labour for industry and commerce. This can be seen in the 2002 TES where liberal arts study is seen as worthwhile due to its ability to provide ‘generic’ vocational skills. This is also seen in both the 2002 and 2007 TES’s belief that curricula should be determined by industrial and commercial groups.

Subjects within the humanities and wider liberal arts, with their supposedly poor market value, occupy an interesting space within the neoliberal influenced policy documents. The hostility displayed towards non-vocational subjects displayed in the 1987 Treasury briefing was to be eventually replaced with a lack of any meaningful attention aside from occasional remarks that non-vocational education served cultural, social, and civic goals. By 2007 policy documents framed university education as an economic activity for all parties involved. The student was framed as requiring up-skilling to obtain employment, the university was framed as existing to provide this up-skilling for employment, and the state as ‘the knowledge society’ is framed as benefiting economically from an increasingly educated workforce. It is

primarily this increased emphasis on the economic aspects of university study, both internationally and in New Zealand, which critics feared would result in the detriment of the liberal education, and the attendant continual decline of liberal arts enrolments (Codd, 2002).

In the following Chapter, a review of the literature on neoliberalism as it applies to the tertiary sector is provided. A particular focus on the liberal arts is provided, and on the way in which various authors have positioned the current and future state of the liberal arts. The Chapter culminates by focusing on liberal arts enrolments as a way to assess the position of the liberal arts in an increasingly neoliberal tertiary environment.



## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### 3.1. Introduction

Throughout the history of the university, both globally and in New Zealand, liberal arts education was seen to provide important social and cultural functions to both the student, and the wider community. These functions were variously seen as preparing young people for social and political life, the preservation and dissemination of culture, the promotion of egalitarian and democratic values, and increasing the happiness and spiritual growth of the citizenry (Burke, 1985).

As a result of various economic and political shifts towards the end of the last century neoliberal ideology within both political and social spheres gained prominence in a number of Western countries, including New Zealand. Inherent in this neoliberal ideology are the notions of economic rationalisation, and decreased state funding and the implementation of user pay systems for some provisions. Higher education in particular experienced a number of reforms (Codd, 2002).

During the late 1990s there was a considerable upsurge in the amount of literature dedicated to predictions regarding these changes in tertiary education. Typically this literature took the form of concerns regarding changes in the nature of knowledge production, and of the purpose and future of the university (Lyotard, 1983; Readings, 1996). While this increase in predictions around tertiary education can somewhat be said to occur as a result of the fin de siècle and the considerable attention that the millennium received, a number of critics also felt that what was occurring in tertiary education in the Western world constituted a very real transition in attitudes and practices in knowledge production (Skolnik, 1998).

An overview of the literature concerning the future of university education reveals a number of commonalities in the arguments made. A review of discussions on the future of the university and liberal education within the university generally reveal a shared

acknowledgement that the university's role, function, and place within society are changing. It is generally argued that a consequence of this change within the university will be an enrolment shift from traditional, humanist, subjects and courses towards more highly vocational subjects and courses (Astin, 1998; Brown, 2003; Corson, 2000; Kuh, 1999; Reid, 2002; Rhoades, 2003; Roberts, 1999). Not all of those who have considered this topic view such a transition negatively, with some arguing that the classical university system is unrealistic and unsustainable (Clark, 2001; Davies, 2001). It is also argued that while changes within the university are occurring, enrolments within the humanities remain relatively stable (Berube, 2011).

In the following I focus my attention on discussions which consider the notion that changes in the university are occurring which will affect the liberal arts. In particular I will be considering the claims that a consequence of neoliberal reform will be a decline in liberal arts enrolments in New Zealand as this shall inform the analysis of enrolment data. I do not attempt to catalogue every prediction of change for liberal arts enrolments. Instead I have focused my attention on the more prominent pieces of literature which deal with the issue in greater depth and considers the causal factors involved, as well as considering a variety of passing claims that liberal arts enrolments are declining found in literature on other topics. I also pay greater attention to literature regarding the future of New Zealand's tertiary system, especially as it relates to the topic of liberal arts enrolments as this is what I shall be considering in my analysis.

### 3.2. The Perpetual Crisis in the Humanities?

Dire predictions regarding the future of liberal arts education are nothing new. Indeed complaints of this nature have been a perennial favourite amongst academics since time immemorial (Axelrod, 1998; Readings, 1996; Skolnik, 1998). In 1922 the Austrian historian Josef Stryzowski presented a lecture in Boston titled *The Crisis in the Humanities as Exemplified in the History of Art* which argued that the liberal arts were in decline due to the

increasing vocationalisation of university education (Bell, 2010). Writing in 1944 Henry Ogden lamented that liberal education had been in decline for years and that the Second World War signalled the death knell of this tradition of education (Ogden, 1944). Similarly, in 1964 the British historian Plumb published a volume of essays entitled *The Crisis in the Humanities* which considered the declining status of the liberal arts (Bell, 2010).

While purported threats to higher education as a result of social factors are evident in writings throughout the 20th century, Reading (1996) and Skolnik (1998) argue that these supposed threats were not of the same magnitude as those faced during the end of the 20th century. It is argued that during the earlier 20th century, institutions of higher education were insulated from external threats by the dominant societal values of egalitarianism, the development of human potential, and the fostering of spiritual growth; values closely aligned with higher education. However, the current threat facing higher education is tied to the increasingly dominant ideology of neoliberalism, the attendant neoliberal value of economic rationalization, and the management of institutes of higher education according to free market principles. Skolnik (1998) identifies economic rationalization as the primary concern in literature on changes to the higher educational sector in the 21st century. The majority of other changes that are felt will affect, or are affecting, higher education in literature, for example corporatization, seeking of external funding, productivity reviews and increased measurement of achievement, bureaucratization, consumer orientated ideas about education, stem from the overarching and pervasive ideology of economic rationalization (Corson, 2000; Skolnik, 1998). Before considering the literature on how neoliberalism intersects with the liberal arts, I first consider some of the issues relevant to the analysis of this body of literature.

### 3.3 Issues Relating to the Analysis of this Body of Literature

While a considerable body of literature regarding predictions of changes to tertiary education in the 21st century emerged during the 1990s, which carried through to the 2000s, the lack of

a unified vocabulary or specific forums for distribution of this literature makes the analysis of this body of work somewhat difficult (Skolnik, 1998). Many of the predictions of change can be found scattered in works dealing primarily with other matters. Such predictions are often made without providing contextual information, or considering causal factors; “in most, if not all cases, the future scenarios in this literature are presented without much evidential or analytical basis” (Skolnik, 1998, p. 638). Indeed, a common criticism of literature on predictions around knowledge production in the 21st century is that it consists of “grandiose predictions which are not well substantiated by data” (Skolnik, 1998, p. 645), although Skolnik (1998) points out that this is an inherent quality of predictions and as such concerns for the future of tertiary education cannot be invalidated on those grounds.

A particular issue in this review is the lack of attention paid towards students, and their education, in literature concerning changes to the tertiary sector. In the abundance of literature concerning contemporary change to higher education it is rare to find mention of how these changes may affect students, or the quality or nature of education that students receive; “Notably absent in this literature [on the effects of neoliberalism on the university] is a substantive discussion of changes in the lives of students” (Saunders, 2007, p.11). This has meant that much of the prominent literature on academic change has not been considered. For example in Slaughter and Leslie’s (1997) 276 page *Academic Capitalism* the only discussion regarding the effects of academic change on students consists of a brief quote from a Ph.D. candidate. Notwonty, Scott and Gibbons (2003) do not discuss students at any time in *Mode 2’ Revisited: The New Production of Knowledge*, neither does Delanty (2001) in *The University in the Knowledge Society*.

While discussions regarding how changes in the academic sector will affect students are scarce, discussions regarding what effects changes will have to the nature and quality of education are even rarer (Saunders, 2007); especially in regards to New Zealand’s tertiary sector. For example in Kelsey’s (1998) paper on the consequences of privatising tertiary education in New Zealand, a single mention is made regarding how pedagogy might be affected; “Market-minded students, as customers, can be expected to demand a greater say over content, ideology, and pedagogy” (p. 68). In their review of how neo-liberalisation has affected tertiary education in New Zealand, Lerner and Le Heron (2005) dedicate several

pages to critiquing the introduction of the performance based review fund, while at no point discussing any changes to the educational experience of students. Additionally, it is noted that in the combined 51 pages of critique of proposed changes to the tertiary sector submitted by Peters and Roberts (1999), and Olssen (2002), any possible consequences of the proposed reforms to students, and any possible consequences to the nature and quality of education that students receive, are not mentioned once. This lacuna of literature regarding how neoliberalism has affected students has meant that the investigation on how contemporary students opt for education is not as thorough as was hoped.

### 3.4 The *Postmodern Condition* and *The University in Ruins*

While I am primarily concerned with literature on the future of liberal arts education within the university written during the late 1990s and early 2000s, a great deal of this theory was influenced by Lyotard's *The Postmodern condition* (Readings, 1996; Roberts 1998) and Readings *The University in Ruins* (Etzkowitz, Webster, & Gebhardt, 2000; Moran, 2010).

Writing in 1979, Jean-François Lyotard argued that “the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (Lyotard, 1984, p.3). For Lyotard (1984),v changes to the status of knowledge are of particular concern to the university as knowledge and its transmission constitute the currency of the tertiary education system. Lyotard (1984) argues that the decline in faith in grand narratives have resulted in, amongst other things, changes in how tertiary education in the Western world is perceived and valued. He also points to other societal shifts that affect how and why knowledge is produced and inculcated. Massification and the demands of post-industrial capitalism are seen as responsible for changes in how and why higher education occurs. In regards to the social role of liberal education Lyotard writes that prior to the transition into post-industrialism higher education:

Entailed the formation and dissemination of a general model of life, most often legitimated by the emancipation narrative. In the context of delegitimation, universities and the institutions of higher learning are called upon to create skills, and no longer ideals. So many doctors, so many teachers in a given discipline, so many engineers, so many administrators, etc. The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions (Lyotard, 1984, p. 48)

What Lyotard (1984) points to is an imminent change in the function of the university from providing students with an education orientated towards narratives of democratization and social progress, towards a function of providing students with a highly vocational education in order to best serve the industrial-commercial capitalist complex. As a result of this shift, enrolments in non-vocational, liberal arts subjects are expected to experience a decline (Lyotard, 1984).

In *The University in Ruins*, Readings argues that the university in Western society is in a state of transition. Reading's (1996) primary thesis is that historically the university's role within society was to legitimate and promote certain cultural values. In particular the cultural values of the nation state:

The current shift in the role of the university is, above all, determined by the decline of the national cultural mission that has up to now provided its *raison d'être* [...] the University is becoming a different kind of institution, one that is no longer linked to the destiny of the nation-state by virtue of its role as producer, protector, and inculcator of an idea of national culture (Readings, 1996, p.3).

For Readings the fate of the classical university is tied to the fate of the nation state. As the nation-state succumbs to economic globalisation as the primary engine behind the production and reproduction of capital, the entities that existed to legitimate the values and culture of the nation-state also succumb. In this way the university finds itself increasingly seeking resourcing from non-state actors; non-state actors with no vested interest in promulgating liberal arts education (Readings, 1996).

Readings (1996) argues that while the classical university was founded upon Kant's ideal of reason, and then utilized Humboldt's ideal of culture, the modern university is founded on the ideal of excellence. This quest for excellence stems from the crisis of legitimation that occurs as a response to the decline of the nation-state, and the university's prior role of cultural legitimator for the nation state. The university therefore attempts to legitimate itself, and attract customers (in the form of student enrolments) by adopting excellence as its guiding principle. Unlike the ideals of reason and culture, excellence is a concept with no external referent or internal content and thus can be fulfilled in an arbitrary fashion.

Where the classical university attempted to fulfill the ideals of reason and culture by researching and teaching subjects which embodied these ideals, for example the liberal arts disciplines of philosophy and literature, the modern university attempts to fulfill the ideal of excellence through often arbitrary bureaucratic means such as ascribing great importance and resourcing based on league tables or the amount of work published by faculty. As a result, liberal arts disciplines, constructed around now defunct legitimations, are easy prey for resourcing cuts which, it is argued, will result in declining enrolments in these areas (Readings, 1996).

### 3.5 Passing References to the Decline of Liberal Arts Education.

A number of scholars make the explicit argument that changes to the tertiary sector are occurring as a result of social, cultural and political trends, and that as a result liberal arts education will experience a decline (Axelrod, 1998; Corson, 2000; Lyotard, 1984; Readings, 1996; Reid, 2002). The notion that liberal arts disciplines will experience a decline in enrolments as a consequence of social and cultural changes is common throughout literature on the contemporary university, but in the majority of cases authors refer to some elements of this argument, but they do this without employing other elements of the argument, or contextualizing the apparent shift. In other cases concern for the future of liberal education is explicitly expressed without discussing the causes for its decline.

For example Astin (1998), Kuh (1999), and Rhoades (2003) posit that students will increasingly opt for vocational education over liberal arts education without delving into the etiology or ramifications of this trend. In some literature the decline of liberal education is seen as having already occurred. Penington (1998), for example, discusses the importance of preserving the remnants of an increasingly defunct liberal education tradition in Australia, while Allen and Ogilvie (2004), Wulf (1998), and Joel (2002) bemoan the loss of a liberal arts component as a requisite for their respective vocational courses.

With varying degrees of analysis as to the origins or consequences of the changes, a number of authors argue that various factors will affect, or are already effecting, the tradition of liberal arts education within universities. For a number of writers dealing primarily with other topics, the decline of enrolments in liberal arts subjects is seen as either in the process of occurring, or imminent. In the majority of this literature neoliberalism is seen as dominant threat facing the liberal arts within universities (Allen and Ogilvie, 2004; Astin, 1998; Joel, 2002; Kuh, 1999; Penington, 1998; Rhoades, 2003; Wulf, 1998).

### 3.6 Neoliberalism as the Primary Agent of Reform

Throughout contemporary literature concerned with changes in the education sector the increasing prominence of neoliberalism is seen as the primary agent of change. Within this literature neoliberalism is conceptualized in a number of different ways and is viewed through a number of different lenses. It is not within the purview of this research to attempt to articulate the ontology of neoliberalism, or to attempt to determine how neoliberalism should be analysed. This has meant that the myriad complexities, tensions, and contradictions inherent in the processes of neoliberalism are treated somewhat unproblematically.

A multiplicity of understandings of neoliberalism are evident in literature concerning higher education. The neoliberalism defined by a policy analyst is quite different to the



neoliberalism defined by a sociologist or anthropologist. For example, Olssen (2005) views neoliberalism as political dogma that is primarily exercised and manifested in governmental policy; Gordon and Whitty (1997) view it as a competitive hegemonic discourse; whereas Bansel (2007) views neoliberalism as a subject position. While understandings of neoliberalism may differ, the idea that some form of contemporary neoliberal movement is responsible for changes to the tertiary sector which, amongst other things, will result in a decline of liberal arts enrolments is prevalent amongst contemporary writers of academic change.

Aside from differences in some details, a number of critics agree that the end of the last century gave rise to a new political and social movement. Centered around conceptions of greater choice and autonomy, personal responsibility, greater implementation of free market principles in state affairs, and a more pronounced emphasis on economic rationalism rather than traditional social mores in decision making, neoliberalism is seen to influence the operations of universities. Governmental policy makers, university management, and students are all felt to apply neoliberal ideologies in regards to higher education. In particular, the neoliberal advocacy of economic rationalism, as opposed to other social and cultural values, is seen as an engine of change within the contemporary university. It is felt that economic rationalism, and the drive for increased profit, is antithetical to the cultural and social functions of higher education, and that ultimately these social and cultural functions will be diminished (Axelrod, 1998; Bansel, 2007; Codd, 2002; Corson, 2000; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gordon & Whitty, 1997; Higgins & Nairn, 2006; Marshall, 1996; Marshall & Peters, 1990; Nairn & Higgins, 2007; Olssen, 2002,2005; Peters, 2006; Roberts, 1999, 2009; Saunders 2007,2010).

In terms of enrolments, the increasing influence of economic rationalism is seen to promote certain forms of higher education, while threatening others. In particular the liberal arts are seen to be at threat due to the perceived lack of an economic payoff. How economic rationalism will result in the detriment of the liberal arts is conceived of in a number of ways, with nation states, the managers of universities, students, and combinations of the three seen as responsible for the imminent decline of enrolments within the liberal arts.

For some the influence of neoliberal ontologies on policy makers is seen as primarily responsible as it is argued that nation states will target resourcing to areas in the university that are perceived to be of greatest benefit to the economy, while cutting funding to the liberal arts (Axelrod, 1998; Bowl, 2010; Davies & Bansel, 2007). Others argue that the influence of economic rationalisation on the management of universities results in the targeting of resources towards subject areas that attract greater state funding, and external funding in the form of commercial contracts and intellectual property (such as patents). As a result liberal arts subjects see both cuts in funding, and the elimination of liberal arts subjects from curricula (Davies, 2001; Symes, 1999).

The argument that the inculcation of neoliberal ideologies in students is responsible for the decline of liberal arts enrolments is a popular one. It is argued that students will opt for profitable, vocational forms of university education over the humanist forms of education found in liberal arts subjects (Brown, 2003; Giroux, 2002; Kuh, 1999; Roberts, 1999; Saunders, 2007, 2010). While differences are evident in how neoliberalism is perceived to affect liberal arts enrolments, the belief that neoliberalism is, or will be, primarily responsible for a decline in liberal arts enrolments is an overarching theme throughout the literature on the topic. In particular the notion of the neoliberal student, 'the entrepreneurial student', oriented toward and motivated by economic reward in their tertiary endeavours has been a popular reason given for the decline of liberal arts enrolments in universities.

### 3.7 The Entrepreneurial Student

A number of critics argue that the liberal arts are in danger due to neoliberalism's creation and advocacy of a new student subject position; the entrepreneurial student (Saunders 2007; 2010). While the term entrepreneurial student is not especially prevalent, the notion of the contemporary student as being primarily economically motivated is. The argument follows that a consequence of neoliberal advocacy of economic rationalism and individualisation is that students will increasingly plan their course of study based on the future profitability of

the education they receive. This will result in more students electing to pursue expressly vocational paths of study, over the non-vocational areas of study within the liberal arts (Astin, 1998; Brown, 2003; Corson, 2000; Kuh, 1999; Reid, 2002; Rhoades, 2003; Roberts, 1999). Some see the entrepreneurial student as one damaging manifestation of neoliberalism amongst a host of other threats caused by neoliberalism, while others see the entrepreneurial student as the primary threat to both the liberal arts and higher education and subsequently view contemporary students with a measure of hostility.

An exception to the belief that the emergence of the entrepreneurial student has occurred as a result of neoliberal advocacy of economic rationalism is noted. For Di Conti (2004) changes to the academic landscape are primarily occurring as a result of changes to the means and mode of capitalist production. Di Conti (2004) argues that the existing and continuing decline of liberal arts enrolments has occurred as a result of economies moving from a manufacturing base to a knowledge base. It is this movement which is seen as changing the priorities of students from gaining intellectual and personal growth, towards gaining specific vocational skills:

As a result of the shift in their priorities, an increasing number of today's students seek to concentrate their studies in subjects they consider relevant to their futures and that ideally might help them in employment opportunities upon graduation. The consequence of this focus for colleges and universities is that many academic departments across the country find themselves struggling with declining enrollments (Di Conti, 2004, p. 171)

The liberal arts in particular are seen as particularly at threat; a process which Di Conti (2004) feels has already occurred: "It is true that one reason for the decline in the liberal arts [enrolments] is due in part to the slow and steady shift in student priorities from general to specialized knowledge" (p. 173). Within contemporary literature which discusses the causality of declines in liberal arts enrolments, Di Conti (2004) is the exception in that she argues that factors other than neoliberalism and economic rationalism are primarily responsible.

For Corson (2000), the emergence of neoliberal ideologies is responsible for the creation of the entrepreneurial student. Corson (2000) argues that the modern liberal education has its

origins in the preparation for polite society received by leisured gentlemen of the landed class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Far from vocational in nature, this manner of liberal education was intended to ensure that young men had the adequate cultural capital required for successful integration into higher society. When massification of education occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century educational providers employed the pre-existing curriculum used by the leisured classes. While liberal education is seen as having some areas of concern, especially around inclinations towards elitism and eurocentricism, it is argued that such an education allows the student to critically engage with their social and cultural world in a constructive way (Corson, 2000).

However, Corson (2000) feels that the neoliberal features of global capitalism and economic rationalism have started to pervade the educational sector to such an extent that they are “contributing to the rapid eclipse of liberal education” (p. 111), and that “formal liberal education [...] has almost run its historical course” (p. 112). Corson (2000) argues that this has occurred due to the increasingly “tight coupling of capitalism with all aspects of social life” (p. 117), meaning that “education almost everywhere is set firmly within capitalist social relations” (p. 117). At the behest of capitalism’s needs both educational providers and students will turn away from liberal arts education. Education providers will focus on delivering education that will best provide those marketplace skills which commercial interests can exploit to its own ends, while students will opt for profitable vocational education over liberal education (Corson, 2000).

In his analysis of the contemporary university system Axelrod (1998) draws upon many of the same concerns to argue that the liberal arts in universities are imperiled. Axelrod (1998) argues that the emergence and prominence of neoliberal ideologies will result in the detriment of the liberal arts. It is argued that “ample public funding to relatively autonomous universities, which enabled the liberal arts to thrive, is in question” (p.10), and that “The doctrines of globalization, privatization, institutional competition, market driven programming, and user-pay fee schedules are now pushing at the gates of higher learning” (Axelrod, 1998, p. 11). For Axelrod (1998) a result of these changes will be a greater focus on the vocational aspects of higher education for students. This will result in an increase in enrolments in vocational courses, and an attendant decline in liberal arts enrolments.

Reid (2002) argues that neoliberal policy regimes are greatly affecting the tertiary sector in Australia and in other countries which incorporate neoliberal policy. The encroachment of neoliberal ideology in all aspects of social life has resulted in a shift that situates tertiary education as both an individual investment, and as a commodity. It is argued that a result of this shift in thinking around the function of higher education will be the decline of forms of higher education which promote democratization and other forms of public good in favour of a specifically vocational higher education which wholly serve the individual student; “In a commodified education system organized around the concept of consumer choice, the dominant ethos is that of self-interest” (Reid, 2002, p. 576). As students increasingly favour vocational education, humanist education based within the liberal arts will decline in enrolments (Reid 2002).

In his discussion of the effects of neoliberalism for higher education Giroux (2002) makes the argument that contemporary society is in the final stages of total inculcation to neoliberal ideologies and that this has reconstituted the individual along purely neoliberal lines; “Within neoliberalism's market-driven discourse, corporate culture becomes both the model for the good life and the paradigmatic sphere for defining individual success and fulfilment” (p. 429). Young people are seen as increasingly motivated by economic concerns and consumerism in their choices. As a consequence students deciding on their university education are primarily motivated by a desire to join the ranks of corporate interests;

Within the neoliberal era of deregulation and the triumph of the market students and their families no longer believe that higher education is about higher learning, but about gaining a better foothold in the job market. Colleges and universities are perceived, and perceive themselves, as training grounds for corporate berths. (Giroux, 2002, p. 435)

For Giroux (2002) the threat to the liberal arts comes from the economic rationalist decision making of both students, and the management of universities. As students opt for more profitable areas of higher education they will abandon the liberal arts and with them the notion of a civically engaged and enlightened education. Universities, also under the

powerful sway of neoliberal ideologies, will not hesitate to marginalise non-vocational education;

Knowledge with a high exchange value in the market is what counts, while those fields such as the liberal arts and humanities that cannot be quantified in such terms will either be underfunded or allowed to become largely irrelevant in the hierarchy of academic knowledge. (Giroux, 2002, p. 442)

In his analysis of the effects of neoliberalism it is apparent that Giroux (2002) is arguing that a shift in how society operates at every level has occurred which has utterly transformed how people and entities make decisions. Evidence for the fundamental shift in the nature of human beings, if perhaps a little light, is presented;

A young couple in Mount Kisco, New York, attempted to auction off on Ebay and Yahoo the naming rights of their soon-to-be-born child to the highest corporate bidder. These are more than oddball stories. As William Powers, a writer for the Atlantic Monthly observes, these public narratives represent “dark fables about what we are becoming as a culture”. One wonders where this type of madness is going to end (Giroux, 2002, p. 427)

Giroux’s (2002), along with the preceding writers concerned with the effects of neoliberalism for the university, discuss the entrepreneurial student in passing. As mentioned earlier, Saunders (2007) notes the dearth of literature concerning the effects of neoliberalism for students. While much has been written on how neoliberal reforms affect staff at universities, often in quite minute detail, very little has been written on the contemporary university student. To this end Saunders (2007, 2010) considers the character and behaviour of the entrepreneurial student in detail.

In his examination of the effects of neoliberalism on university students Saunders (2007) argues that the encroachment of neoliberal ideology in all domains has resulted in a shift in the priorities of contemporary students of higher education;

The neoliberal focus on wealth and economic success can help to understand a radical shift in students' goals, motivations, and their purpose of going to college [...] research shows students to be increasingly competitive and have a declining interest in the liberal arts (2007, p.65).

For Saunders (2007, 2010), prior to neoliberalism students attended university to become civically engaged, and obtain intellectual growth and spiritual enlightenment. However, contemporary students demonstrate total acquiescence to neoliberal ideologies resulting in the rejection of any cultural and social functions of higher education;

Students, as rational economic actors, changed their goals from what were largely intrinsic, such as developing a meaningful philosophy of life, to larger extrinsic goals including being very well off financially (Saunders, 2010, p.54)

As well as being characterized by greed, ignorance, and civic apathy, the current generation of university students are also seen as inferior to their predecessors in other interesting ways;

Those placing high importance on extrinsic goals tend to have a lower psychological wellbeing, are increasingly depressed, anxious, and narcissistic, at a greater risk of engaging in high risk behaviors, and have more conflicted relationships with friends and partners than those with individuals who place high importance on intrinsic goods (Saunders, 2007, p.5)

Saunders (2007, 2010) concludes both papers by hoping that his contributions might go some way in arresting the spread of neoliberalism within universities. While light on evidence, Saunders (2007, 2010) papers articulate the common, yet predominantly implicit, argument that a feature of neoliberalism is that university students will increasingly employ economic rationalist motives in their selection of university study. The argument follows that the selection of university courses based on economic motivations will favour explicitly vocational courses over non-vocational courses, such as those found in the liberal arts.

### 3.8 The Entrepreneurial Student in New Zealand

While a great deal has been written on changes to the New Zealand academic landscape as a result of neo-liberal reform, very little has been written on how these changes might affect New Zealand university students or their education. For example Codd (2002), Kelsey (1998), Lerner and Le Heron (2005), Olssen (2002), Peters and Roberts (1999), and Tobias (1997) all critique neoliberal reform within New Zealand without discussing what effect, positive or negative, that these changes might have to students.

Roberts (1999) is unique in that he explicitly predicts changes to student course selection behaviour as a result of the neoliberal reforms occurring within New Zealand universities, and discusses the students involved. Roberts (1999) argues that as a result of neoliberal reform, and the marketisation and commodification of higher education, students within universities will adopt a purely instrumental view of university education. For Roberts (1999) the neoliberal ideology and attendant economic rationalisation advocated by policy makers will somehow be inculcated into students. This, it is argued, will result in greater numbers of students opting for vocational university education;

We might expect to see (further) changes in patterns of course selection. Utilitarian criteria (based on prospects for income generation at the completion of a programme) will be uppermost in many minds. The idea of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, or of engaging in a programme of study given a passion for learning in a particular subject area, will seem quaint - if it is remembered at all (Roberts, 1999, p. 73)

Even students who defy neoliberal economic rationalisation will not pursue liberal arts subjects and courses as the structural constraints of increasing tuition, and lowered governmental resourcing for these areas will drive students into vocational areas of study:

In a system driven by [economic] imperatives, students with limited financial resources will often be, in effect, forced to abandon areas of study and human endeavour to which they might otherwise make a major contribution (Roberts, 1999, p. 74)



As a result of expected decreases in governmental support and falling student enrolments particular disciplines will be excised from the university curriculum. In particular non-vocational humanities subjects will be most at threat; “The most vulnerable of the disciplines - and here I would include most subjects in the humanities as prime "targets" - will struggle to survive” (Roberts, 1999, p. 78). For Roberts (1999) the greatest threat for the future of liberal arts education comes from the calculating students which the university is compelled to interact with:

The consumer knows what she wants (or believes she knows what she wants). In the neoliberal educational marketplace she enters into a contract with a provider, who becomes obliged to supply what is wanted, and devours the product or service hungrily. Her eagerness springs from the desire to put the qualification or course (or whatever else has been "purchased") to work in serving her own interests over others and in positioning herself to be successful in the competitive world of the market (p. 81)

Roberts (1999) argument is predicated on the belief that the vast majority of students will wholly absorb the tenets of neoliberalism and abandon every other social and cultural influence in their decision making processes. These students will view higher education purely in terms of its economic utility and opt for vocational subjects and courses over liberal arts subjects. The minority of students not under the sway of neoliberal ideology will also be compelled to opt for vocational subjects and courses: although the cause of this is not explained in great detail. Ultimately Roberts (1999) predicts a dramatic decline in liberal arts enrolments in universities in New Zealand. This raises the question of how contemporary students decide on their courses of study.

### 3.9 How Students Choose their Courses of Study

A considerable body of literature can be found which suggests that the contemporary university students' choice in subject matter is primarily motivated by interest, and not the

economic motives outlined above. A lack of longitudinal research regarding the motivations of university students is noted; therefore it is entirely possible that students have become more instrumental in their decision making. However, as the literature shows contemporary students do not seem to exhibit a “relentless consumer mentality” (Brown, 2003, p. 15), or purely economic rationalist approach to their selection of higher education.

In their analysis of students’ perceptions of the study of accountancy in New Zealand, Tan and Laswad (2009) surveyed first year accountancy students on the factors influencing why they chose the subject. While post educational career prospects featured as an important reason for the selection of accountancy, interest in accountancy and aptitude for mathematics were the primary motivators for students to choose to study the subject:

Research suggests that college students choose specific majors that they perceive as being compatible with their particular personal styles, [research into why students choose accountancy] indicate that genuine interest in the subject is an important selection factor (Tan and Laswad, 2009, p. 235)

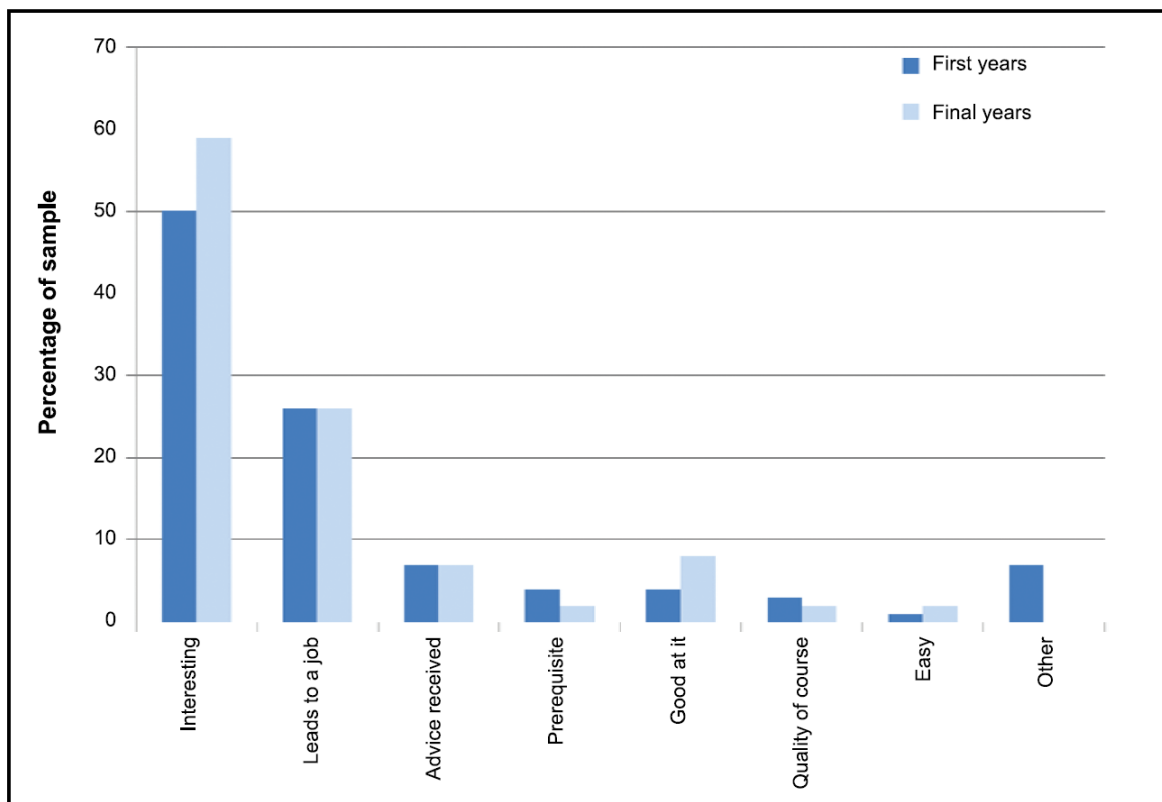
Matusovich, Streveler, & Miller (2010) found that engineering students in their fourth year were more motivated by interest in the subject rather than by financial motives. When students majoring in pharmacology were asked “How important are the following factors in your choice of major?”, 88% of respondents selected ‘Interested in science’, and 86% selected ‘Like chemistry’. The economic instrumentality of this expressly vocational subject fared worse, with 74% of respondents selecting ‘Job security’, 70% selecting ‘Projected earnings’, and 67% choosing ‘Current job market’ (Keshishian, Brocavich, Boone, & Somnath, 2010).

Similarly research into why students choose to enrol in business degrees found that interest in the subject and not vocational considerations was more influential in their decision making. When asked for their ‘Primary reason for choosing major’ 29.8% of students who majored in accounting, finance, general business, management, and marketing selected the response ‘I am interested in this type of work’ from 11 possible options. This is compared to 16.7% of students who selected ‘Good job opportunities with this major’ (Kim, Markham, Cangelosi, 2002). Follow up research into why students choose to major in business found that students

were primarily motivated by interest, followed by aptitude, with vocational factors coming in third (Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005). Even for business majors, a subject area characterised by attendance to notions of economic rationalism, profit and loss, and the management of finances, students remain primarily motivated by interest.

Recent research from New Zealand also shows that students select their degree based primarily on interest. In their analysis of 191 first year and 171 final year students at Otago University Buissink-Smith, Spronken-Smith, and Walker (2010) found that “the main reasons for selecting a particular major for both first and final year students was because of an interest in the topic, with a distant second being because it leads to a job” (p. 362). Their findings regarding why students opt for their course of study are outlined below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Main reasons for selecting a major for both first- and final-year students.



Note: Percentages are calculated for the sample of 191 first-year students and 171 final-year students

(Buissink-Smith, Spronken-Smith, & Walker, 2010, p. 361)

Research into why students chose their university study does not show that all students are not influenced by economic motives in their selection of education, but it does show that other factors figure more heavily for the majority of students in their decision making than economic motive. One of the more extreme examples of this can be seen in Carter's (2006) research which found that for students majoring in computer science, interest in computer games was a greater factor in their decision to major in the subject than perceived financial reward.

Recent research from the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand shows that students are more likely to base their study around an interest in a subject, than the vocational opportunities that the subject provides. Rather than exhibiting a purely instrumental view of higher education the majority of contemporary students, both internationally and in New Zealand, choose to study subjects that they have an interest in. As discussed, the lack of longitudinal research regarding the motivations for students in their choice of university education does mean that it is entirely plausible that students have become more instrumental in their decision making. However there is a marked disparity between how contemporary students choose their education, and how they are perceived to choose their education by the critics discussed. While the preceding has primarily considered criticisms of the university and students under neoliberalism, it is important to note also that there are authors who are supportive of neoliberal reform in the tertiary sector.

### 3.10 Support for Neoliberal Reform within the University.

While much has been written on changes on the operation of the university not all of the literature regarding changes to the tertiary sector is hostile to such changes, and not all predictions regarding the decline of liberal arts are critical of such a shift. Some argue that changes will occur to the tertiary sector as a result of increasing economic rationalism, but that this change will be to the benefit of universities, governments, the industrial/ commercial sectors, and the students (consumers) of the university.

In *The Entrepreneurial University: New Foundations for Collegiality, Autonomy, and Achievement* Clark (2001) argues that changes affecting universities are the result of an imbalance between the demands that are placed upon the university, and their incapacity to respond in their traditional form; a form characterized as “rigidified internal structures that were constructed in the simpler days of elite higher education” (Clark, 2001, p. 64). In order to survive, and indeed prosper, during imminent massive funding cuts Clark feels that universities should adopt an entrepreneurial style characterized by the relentless pursuit of non-state funding “raised by [any] means widely approved as legitimate” (Clark, 2001, p. 12, p. 64). By not relying on state funding universities will rid themselves of the attendant oppressive yoke of state regulation that constrains the freedom of universities and removes their ability to prosper. Clark (2001) goes on to argue that greater collegiality, quality of education, and autonomy will all occur naturally as a result of greater contact with the free market and the removal of oppressive state interference.

In a similar vein Davies (2001) explores the evolution and implementation of the entrepreneurial university in *The Emergence of Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Universities*. Davies (2001) begins by discussing the ‘pre-entrepreneurial’ non-corporate style of universities which are characterized as non-interventionist, individualistic, insular, defensive, in denial about changes to the external world, distrustful of the norms of the marketplace in which they operate, low accountability, unable to confront problems, collegial, and bureaucratic. In the new milieu of decreased public funding, globalisation, and the increasing demand to provide highly applicable research and education for use by the industrial and commercial sector these characteristics are not economically viable.

The implementation of an entrepreneurial style to a university will require some changes to the traditional, or pre-entrepreneurial, system. Davies (2001) advises that universities consider which departments and disciplines contribute the greatest economic return to the university and then concentrate resources to these profitable areas: “One would normally expect units like information technology, business, law, engineering, biotechnology, etc. to have more [earnings] potential than say theology or history” (Davies, 2001, p. 32). Those

areas that are not profitable, framed here as liberal arts subjects, would be excised from the curriculum.

The Clark (2001) and Davies (2001) papers I have looked at in-depth serve as exemplars of the arguments for applying free market orientated economic rationalism to universities in the wake of imminent public funding decreases. It is argued that the nature of university education and management is in a period of drastic change as a result of factors resulting in changes to the resourcing of knowledge production. The traditional university system is seen as highly flawed and incapable of operating in the contemporary economic milieu, and both authors go on to advocate ways in which the universities of the future may effectively be run according to free market principles (Clark, 2001; Davies, 2001). This is a position which, while not particularly popular in literature regarding changes to the university, is existent (for examples see Coaldrake, 2001; Daumard, 2001; Etzkowitz, Webster, & Gebhardt, 2000; McInnis, 2001; Mora and Villarreal, 2001; Pratt, 2001; Van Vught, 1999).

In the ideal universities envisioned by the previous writers liberal arts education occupies an interesting space. Broadly speaking advocates of neoliberal reform within universities are not explicitly against the concept of liberal arts education; but they are heavily in favour of types of education that best serve the interests of commerce and industry in order to make profit, and some do make the point that liberal education typically does not fit into this category (Coaldrake, 2001; Davies, 2001). Exceptions are noted where forms of liberal arts education were profitable, and therefore good:

The author was most impressed by the earning power of a department of moral philosophy in one university which, because of contracts in ethical codes of conduct relating to electronic communications, earned more in a given year than the engineering faculty (Davies, 2001, p. 32)

Within discussions advocating neoliberal reform within the university the role of the liberal arts is primarily concerned with its profitability and not with any other social, civic, or personal function that may result from this form of education. The advocates of neoliberal reform argue that universities are in the process of, or should be in the process of, moving

towards operating universities under free-market principles primarily concerned with obtaining profit. As the liberal arts are generally seen as less profitable than other subject areas their place within university curricula is questioned.

Regardless of how neoliberal reform is conceptualised in the tertiary sector there is little empirical evidence that looks at whether liberal arts subject enrolments have declined or not, either internationally or in New Zealand. In the following I consider the available empirical evidence of change in liberal arts enrolments, as a method of measuring whether the neoliberal arts are or have been in decline, or not.

### 3.11 Empirical Evidence of Changes in Liberal Arts Enrolments

While a number of authors and critics discuss changes in enrolments patterns concerning the liberal arts, there is a conspicuous lack of statistical evidence used in their arguments. Indeed none of the preceding critics I have considered utilise solid statistical evidence of student enrolment trends to support their arguments. While the assertion that liberal arts enrolments are declining is often made, it seems that the proposition is so uncontroversial as to not require statistical evidence of the fact. For example Birrell, Edwards, Dobson, and Smith (2005) assert that the years 2001 – 2004 saw a decrease in liberal arts enrolments in Australia (liberal arts here is coded as an amalgam of humanities and social science subjects), but present no figures to back up this assertion. Likewise Conner (2007) speaks of “declining enrollments in the humanities” (p. 7) without presenting any statistical evidence for this statement.

In those cases where statistical evidence for declines in liberal arts enrolments are presented this information is not applicable to the New Zealand context between the years 2001 - 2010. For example Vale (2011) argues that declines in humanities enrolments evident in South Africa are indicative of an international decline in humanities enrolments. Vale (2011)

presents evidence that humanities enrolments are declining in South Africa (the humanities share of total undergraduate enrolments dropped from 46% in 1996 to 27% in 2008), but does not present any evidence that this trend extends beyond South Africa. Numan, Islam, and Sadat (2007) report that the Bangladesh Open University observed a decline in enrolments in subjects in the humanities and social sciences between 2000 and 2005, but do not elaborate with figures of this decline.

Other enrolment statistics encountered fall outside of the time frame I intend to investigate and are therefore of little use in this research. For example Rose (2011) notes that between 1968 – 2008 American universities saw a 2.9% decrease in the proportion of degrees granted in humanities subjects, and an 8.3% decrease in degrees awarded in the social sciences. However as Berube (2002) notes;

The mid-1960s represented a high-water mark for study in the humanities in the United States, a period unmatched in the history of the Republic. It is impossible to construct a narrative of anything but precipitous decline in the humanities when one starts from the mid-1960s (p. 21).

In discussions on enrolment trends within the humanities, and the wider liberal arts, Berube (2002, 2011) is unique in that he argues that within the United States at least, liberal arts enrolments are not in danger of decline, and that enrolments in this area have actually experienced an increase (although no exact figures are presented): “enrollments [in humanities] have not merely held steady for ten years; they have increased, both in absolute and relative terms, since 1980” (Berube, 2011, p. 34). Berube (2011) argues that the simultaneous popular belief of a decline in liberal arts coupled with a conspicuous lack of statistical evidence is indicative of irrational paranoia for the future of the humanities.



### 3.12 Berube and the ‘Zombie belief’ of Humanities Decline

The notion that enrolments in the liberal arts are either in decline, or will decline, is a popular one. Yet however popular this belief is, there is little statistical evidence which shows this to be the case. Berube (2011) argues that this discrepancy between popular belief and evidence around liberal arts enrolments is a “Zombie belief” (p. 5); that is a belief that is not alive, yet cannot be killed.

Berube (2011) points to examples in the media where the proposition that liberal arts enrolments are declining is made, even while statistics contradicting this statement are presented in the same piece. In one example a 2009 piece in *The Times* discusses the fall of enrolments in the liberal arts but then goes on to present statistical evidence showing that enrolments have been stable for a decade. In another example Berube (2011) discusses how in 2010 the president of Harvard University, Drew Faust appeared on a news program to discuss the role of the humanities. Faust argued that enrolment rates in the humanities had dropped from 17.8% to 8% of total enrolments at Harvard University. However the graphic presented to illustrate this point showed that the 17.8% enrolment in the humanities occurred in 1967, and that in fact humanities enrolments had been hovering around 8% for the last two decades. One of Berube’s (2011) central arguments is that the concern and paranoia exhibited by those who argue that humanities enrolments are in decline is the result of fears around the marginalization of the humanities as a result of the success of some vocational subjects, but that ultimately humanities enrolments are not in decline.

### 3.13 Conclusion

Across the literature on the future of the university a number of trends are evident. Chief amongst these is the acknowledgement that the university is undergoing a period of intense change. This change is predominantly seen to occur as a response to the rise of neoliberal

ideologies, especially the importance of economic rationalism in decision making. The implementation of economic rationalist decisions regarding universities by various parties is seen to be to the detriment of the liberal arts, and is seen to affect enrolments in the liberal arts. University students especially are seen to be under the sway of neoliberal ideologies. The argument is made that students will increasingly employ economic rationalist motives in their decision making regarding study and as a result opt for profitable vocational paths of study over non-vocational paths of study such as those found within the liberal arts. However there is a considerable body of literature which asserts that for university students, both in New Zealand and internationally, the choice to enrol in a particular subject is more influenced by interest in the subject, rather than the material rewards that are afforded by study in that subject.

While the authors I have examined may disagree as to the virtue or wisdom of these changes, there is a common understanding across the authors I consider that changes around liberal arts enrolments will occur, or are occurring. Of varying concern to these authors is the role that the liberal arts will take in the changing university. Some view the purported imminent decline of the liberal arts as a tragedy, and advocate strategies to counter this trend. Others view the decline of the liberal arts as a natural and evolutionary process resulting from greater implementation of free market ideology in tertiary education, and therefore should not be interfered with. While the authors I consider may disagree whether the decline of liberal arts within university education is necessarily a good or bad thing there is a general consensus, with the exception of Berube (2011), that the liberal arts will experience a decline in enrolments at the beginning of the 21st century.

While a number of critics argue that the liberal arts are in decline, many do not offer supporting evidence for that proposition. In many cases it seems to be such an uncontroversial statement that writers will propose strategies for correcting the problem of declining enrolments without first demonstrating that such a decline is occurring. The literature which does show statistical evidence that suggests that liberal arts enrolments are declining tends to be highly specific and non-generalisable either globally, or within the New Zealand context. Berube (2011) argues that fears around declines of liberal arts enrolments are the result of the concerns of liberal art faculty that the liberal arts are being delegitimised

and marginalized as a result of the increasing commercialisation of tertiary education, but that in the United States at least liberal arts enrolments are not in decline.

Understanding what effect neoliberal reform has had on the popularity of liberal arts subjects in New Zealand requires a longitudinal analysis of university enrolments in order to determine whether students are opting away from liberal arts subjects. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used in this research to understand whether liberal arts subjects experienced a decline in enrolments between the years 2001 to 2010 in New Zealand.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

Critics have argued that a consequence of neoliberal reforms both generally, and especially within the university, is that students will opt for more profitable vocational papers over those non-vocational papers found in the liberal arts (Astin, 1998; Corson, 2000; Giroux, 2002; Kuh, 1999; Penington, 1998; Peters, 1999; Readings, 1996; Skolnik, 1998; Van Vught, 1999). This thesis seeks to determine whether enrolments in liberal arts subjects have experienced a decline between the years 2001 to 2010 in New Zealand. In my enquiry I analyse university enrolment data between the years 2001 to 2010 both in terms of actual enrolments in liberal arts subjects, and in relation to the number of total university enrolments. This makes it possible to learn more about enrolment trends and patterns in tertiary education in New Zealand given both the changes that have occurred to the sector in recent years, and the predictions made about the sector.

The methodology employed in this research was chosen due to its ability to provide quantitative results regarding the question of whether or not enrolments in the liberal arts have seen the changes predicted. The longitudinal quantitative analysis of enrolment data from both Massey University and a database of nationally aggregated university enrolment data will determine whether enrolment patterns cohere to the predictions made by scholars regarding the consequences of neoliberal reform.

The design of the methodology used in this research has been influenced by a number of factors. The research questions and objectives, operational definitions, limitations and delimitations, ethical considerations, the nature of the samples to be analysed, issues around the codification of data, and the rationales used for the codification schedule have all been considerations that have had to be taken into account in order to create a methodology that will satisfactorily address the objective of this thesis. While some limitations around the generalizability of this research are noted, ultimately it is argued that the methodology employed in this research is apposite for the task of addressing the question of whether

enrolments in liberal arts subjects within New Zealand experienced a decline between 2001 to 2010.

In this chapter I begin by setting out an operational definition for the problematic term 'liberal arts', because while it occupies a central position in this thesis, there is no formal definition for the liberal arts. An overview of the research design and a description of the two datasets used for analysis is then provided. The sample population and process for data collection are described, followed by the ethical considerations along with the methodological limitations of this research.

## 4.2 Operational Definition for the Liberal Arts

Examining enrolments in liberal arts subjects requires an operational definition of the liberal arts, which may be applied to enrolment data. However, there is little general consensus as to what subject groupings fall into this category, let alone whether the liberal arts can be defined in terms of subject classifications at all; "the definition of liberal arts is problematic (some studies define it at an institutional level, some in terms of coursework, pedagogy, etc.)" (Blaich, Bost, Chan, & Lynch, 2004, p. 11).

The 'liberal arts' originally referred to the body of learning that free citizens in Greek and Roman antiquity were expected to learn in order to engage in both civic duties, and polite society. The term was formalized in fifth century Rome to include the seven disciplines of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. This formal definition of the liberal arts was adopted by medieval European universities where to be receive a liberal arts education meant to be comprehensively educated in those seven areas (Iverson, 1985).

However modern usage of the term is not constrained to these seven subjects, or, as it has been argued, a specific list of subjects of all (Iverson, 1985). Rather the common

understanding of what the liberal arts are is somewhat nebulous and therefore difficult to codify. I will therefore discuss some understandings of what the Liberal Arts are in order to justify the codification schedule I have used for this research.

The liberal arts are seemingly universally regarded as being non-vocational (Adler, 2009; Axelrod, 2001; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005; Grabowsky & Harden Fritz, 2007; Lewis, 1994). In every definition of the liberal arts encountered the liberal arts are seen as being distinct from subjects designed to teach specifically vocational techniques such as accountancy or veterinary science. For some writers the non-vocational nature of a subject constitutes the sole requirement for it to be classified as a liberal arts subject, or as part of a liberal arts education. For example Lewis (1994) describes higher education as a dichotomy consisting of liberal and vocational education, while Adler (2009) points to the non-vocational nature of pure mathematics as evidence of its inclusion as part of a Liberal Arts education; “Today, we understand the liberal arts to include the study of the arts and sciences, and we contrast the liberal arts with vocational education” (p. 7).

In the same vein Brint et al (2005) define ‘liberal arts’ as any subject or discipline without an explicitly vocational referent. Such a definition includes mathematics and subjects within the hard sciences such as the physical sciences and biological sciences. Brint et al’s (2005) definition of the liberal arts consists of:

Area, ethnic and cultural studies, Biological sciences/Life sciences, Communications (except those found under occ./prof.), English language and literature/letters, Foreign languages and literatures, History, Law and legal studies (except those found under occ./prof.), Liberal/general studies & humanities, Mathematics, Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies, Philosophy and religion, Physical Sciences, Psychology (except those found under occ./prof.), Social Sciences, Visual & performing arts (p. 163)

While a number of writers define liberal arts subjects purely in terms of their vocational content, this understanding does not reflect what is generally meant by the term. This is especially apparent when considering highly scientific, but non-vocational subjects such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics, which are considered to be liberal arts subjects by some; “In the liberal-arts tradition, scientific disciplines, such as mathematics and physics, are considered [as] equally liberal [as] philosophy, history, literature, music, art” (Adler,

2009, p. 9). However the understanding of liberal arts employed more generally, and in this research, requires a concern for the human condition not present in scientific disciplines.

As Munzel (2003) argues, while the term liberal arts did originally refer to a body of subjects which included hard sciences, the term within contemporary popular usage, both within the university and wider society, refers to non-vocational, non-specialised, non-scientific subjects fundamentally concerned with human beings. Munzel (2003) argues that the liberal arts have, since their inception in classical Rome and Greece, been fundamentally concerned with human beings and the purely scientific and abstract elements of the liberal arts were not studied in order to better understand those subjects, but rather to hone the critical faculties required in order to better understand varying humanist concerns; “The discipline of the mind provided by studies in logic was no mere theoretical or academic exercise; rather, such discipline was deemed the *sine qua non* [An essential element or condition] for the prudent and moral, just life.” (Munzel, 2003, p. 48).

For Munzel (2003) the lack of a humanist referent in contemporary scientific endeavour disqualifies scientific disciplines as belonging to the liberal arts. Furthermore Munzel (2003) argues that post nineteenth-century pedagogy has seen an explicit division in subject content and aim between the Liberal Arts and hard sciences, with the hard sciences withdrawing from the more subjective and human orientated liberal arts tradition to pursue a more objective and abstracted line of inquiry. This humanist factor is echoed by Grabowsky and Harden Fritz (2007) where liberal arts subjects are based within the humanities and social sciences, and are grounded in humanist concerns. This is in contrast to the non-humanist object of inquiry inherent in scientific subjects.

The codification of humanities and social sciences subjects together as a homogenous grouping is seen frequently in literature which tests propositions relating to activity within the university. While this grouping is often explicitly referred to as comprising the Liberal Arts, such as in Harley et al’s (2006) examination of how students in this group employ digital resources. It is often the case that this grouping is made without explicitly employing the label liberal arts, for example both Ishiyama (2002) and Head (2008) group humanities and social science students together and in contrast to scientific and vocational students in their

quantitative analyses on undergraduate student pedagogy without ever employing the term 'liberal arts'

Also fitting this criteria of non-scientific and non-vocational subjects with a humanist bent are subjects within the arts. In their analysis of the state of the liberal arts in Canadian universities Axelrod, Anisef, and Lin (2001) define the core subjects of liberal arts as belonging to "the humanities, the social sciences and the fine arts" (p. 47), similarly Giles and Drewes (2001) define liberal arts subjects as belonging exclusively to the humanities, social sciences, and arts. Some subjects within the arts do not qualify as liberal arts subjects given the rationale used in this research; for example the vocationally orientated subject of design. However other subjects typically categorized in this field, such as art appreciation and theory, meet the non-vocational, non-scientific criteria used in this research and are generally recognized as Liberal Arts subjects (Adler, 2009; Grabowsky & Harden Fritz, 2007; Munzel, 2003; Schneider, 2008).

Based on these understandings, the basis of my codification schedule of what constitutes the liberal arts in contemporary society, and the subjects therein was developed. The operational definition of liberal arts subjects in this research is mostly closely aligned to understanding of liberal arts discussed by Axelrod (1998), and then employed by Axelrod, Anisef, & Lin (2001) in their quantitative analysis of how students from the liberal arts fared in the Canadian job market after graduation. Thus the definition of liberal arts used in this research consists of subjects from the areas of humanities, social sciences, and creative arts that are non-vocational, non-scientific, and are primarily focused on humanist concerns.

### 4.3 Research Design

In order to test whether enrolments in the liberal arts have seen the declines expected by some scholars I collected all enrolment data for the years 2001 to 2010 for both Massey University,



and for the whole of New Zealand's university system. While I had initially hoped to begin the analysis for the year 2000, both the HEMI system employed by Massey University and the Ministry of Education counting system only came into operation in 2001, so therefore detailed enrolment data for the year 2000 is non-existent. After obtaining the two enrolment datasets I then categorised the enrolments as either belonging to or not belonging to the liberal arts (the rationale I use for defining liberal arts is discussed in detail further in the chapter). I then analysed and charted both the Massey University data, and the nationally aggregated university data using Excel in order to see what trends in enrolments in the liberal arts are evident over the sample years 2001 to 2010, and determined whether a correlation exists between the enrolment patterns between these two datasets. From this I was able to consider whether enrolments in the liberal arts in New Zealand have experienced the decline predicted by some commentators on tertiary education.

The enrolment data analysed in this research is comprised of two key data sets. The first enrolment dataset I use is comprised of the yearly datasets of student enrolments which are collected and maintained by Massey University. The second enrolment dataset used in this research is the national database of university enrolments maintained by the Ministry of Education. In order to compare and contrast the results of the two datasets I codified and classified the data found in these datasets similarly. This has been a determining factor in the rationale used for my choice of how enrolments needed to be codified as either belonging to the liberal arts, or not belonging to the liberal arts. The national enrolment data is aggregated at a broader subject level than the Massey University data alone. This has meant that I have classified enrolments in the Massey University at a slightly broader level than I would have if I had used only the Massey University data.

#### 4.3.1 The Massey University Data

The Massey University paper enrolments are categorised as belonging to one of the five colleges which comprises Massey University. Paper enrolments belonging to the Colleges of

Humanities and Social Sciences, and the College of Creative Arts (prior to 2005 the College of Design, Fine arts, and Music) are separated from the paper enrolments belonging to the other three colleges (Colleges of Business, Education, and Science). The enrolments in papers in the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Creative Arts which do not fit the criteria as a liberal arts subject are then omitted and are grouped with the enrolments of the Colleges of Business, Education, and Science and are counted as not being liberal arts subjects (the rationale used for defining liberal arts subjects is discussed later). Table 1 presents the schedule used for the Massey University enrolment data in this research (overleaf).

Subjects Codified as Liberal Arts	Subjects Codified as non-Liberal Arts
<p>Arts and Languages Education,  Chinese,  Classical Studies,  Development Studies,  East Asian Studies,  English,  English Language Studies,  European Studies,  Fine Arts,  Geography,  History,  Humanities/Social Sciences<sup>2</sup>,  Japanese,  Labour Studies,  Linguistics,  Maori,  Maori Studies,  Media Studies,  Music,  Performance Design,  Performing Arts,  Philosophy,  Photography,  Policy Studies,  Politics,  Psychology,  Public policy,  Religious Studies,  Social and Policy studies,  Social Anthropology,  Sociology,  Visual And Material Culture,  Women's Studies.</p>	<p>All subjects from the;  College of Business,  College of Education,  College of Science,  Omitted from College of Humanities and Social Sciences;  Defence studies,  Emergency Services,  Health,  Health Sciences,  Midwifery,  Museum Studies,  Nursing Studies,  Police Studies,  Public Health,  Rehabilitation Studies,  Resource and Environmental Planning,  Social Work.  Foundational studies in;  Agriculture and Horticulture,  Accountancy,  Chemistry,  Management,  Mathematics,  Physics.  Omitted from College of Arts;  Art and Design studies,  Industrial design,  Fashion Design,  Spatial/ Interior design,  Textile Design,  Transport design,  Visual Communication Design.</p>

Table 1: Massey University Liberal Arts Schedule

<sup>2</sup> The subject of Humanities/Social Sciences offers a number of elementary preparatory papers up to advanced postgraduate papers employing mixed methods from a number of other subjects within the humanities, and social sciences such as geography, anthropology, sociology, and politics.

Analysis of enrolment rates in the liberal arts requires the codification of enrolments as either belonging to the liberal arts or not. In order to do this I categorised subjects as either belonging to the liberal arts or not belonging to the liberal arts at the level of paper prefix. For example all enrolments in papers beginning 176.xxx (sociology) are codified as liberal arts papers. The decision to code papers at the paper prefix level was largely due to the logistical difficulties involved in considering each and every paper as either belonging to the liberal arts or not. This has meant that some liberal arts papers being offered under a non-liberal arts prefix have been omitted. For example, while an enrolment in 149.350 ‘The History of Defence and Security Intelligence’ seems to qualify as a liberal arts enrolment under the rationale employed in this research, it belongs to the subject of Defence and Strategic Studies which has been classified as not belonging to the liberal arts and has therefore been omitted. Conversely some non-liberal arts paper enrolments have been included as liberal arts subjects for the same reason. For example 133.138 “The physics of music” does not seem to qualify as a liberal arts paper, but its enrolments are codified as liberal arts enrolments as the paper falls under the rubric of 133.xxx, Music Studies. In one case I have categorised papers within prefixes for the sake of consistency and continuity. For example, prior to 2008 ‘Policy Studies’ and ‘Social Work’ were aggregated into a single prefix (179.xxx). According to the criteria used in this research ‘Policy Studies’ are considered a Liberal Arts subject, while ‘Social Work’ is not. Therefore for enrolments prior to 2008, before these subjects were disaggregated, I have categorised within the prefix.

While I had initially planned to graph the 34 subjects comprising the liberal arts subjects at Massey University, the vagaries of administrative change to these subjects means that it is not possible to accurately chart changes in enrolments for individual subjects. Between 2005 and 2006 enrolments in ‘Music’ experienced a precipitous decline. This was not as a result of changing preferences for the subject, but rather the formation by Victoria University and Massey University of the New Zealand School of Music. Similar issues were found for a number of subjects. For example my data showed an increase of over 400% for the share of enrolments enjoyed by ‘Politics’. However when I investigated this increase I discovered that between 2001 to 2010 ‘Politics’ had been in the process of transferring papers away from ‘Philosophy’, which had previously subsumed the subject of ‘Politics’. This meant that not only were the ‘Politics’ figures biased, but also those of ‘Philosophy’. Similarly a decline in

'English' enrolments could possibly be attributed to the separation of a very popular preparatory paper into a different subject half-way through the period of analysis. Due to the dynamic nature of paper arrangements between subjects it is not possible to determine whether changing enrolment trends in individual subjects are necessarily indicative of changes in the preference of students, or result from extrinsic factors. However these issues do not greatly affect the aggregated liberal arts results for Massey University as movements of papers between subjects occurs between those subjects with an interstitial area, or to put it another way share a 'border'. While papers may transfer between liberal arts subjects, it is less likely that papers would transfer from the liberal arts to vocational or scientific areas of study, and vice versa (Thompson-Klein, 1996).

#### 4.3.2 The National Aggregated Data

The national data was obtained from the Tertiary Sector – Fields of Study spread sheets obtained from the Ministry of Education website [www.educationcounts.govt.nz](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz). The national dataset is categorised into 11 broad fields of study: Natural and Physical Sciences, Information Technology, Engineering and Related Technologies, Architecture and Building, Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies, Health, Education, Management and Commerce, Society and Culture, Creative Arts, Food, Hospitality and Personal Services, and Mixed Field Programmes. As with the Massey University enrolment data, the national data was codified as either belonging to the liberal arts or not, according to a codification rationale.

Of the 11 broad fields of study the fields of Society and Culture, and Creative Arts were categorised as liberal arts subjects while the other nine broad fields of study were categorised as not. I then took Society and Culture, and Creative Arts fields and further refined them as either belonging to the liberal arts or not, using the same criteria I employed when codifying the Massey University enrolment data. From the Society and Culture field I excised the subjects of 'Human Welfare Studies and Services', 'Law', 'Justice and Law Enforcement',

‘Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies’, ‘Economics and Econometrics’, ‘Sport and Recreation’, and ‘Other Society and Culture’. From the Creative Arts I excised ‘Graphic and Design Studies’, and ‘Other Creative Arts’. I added the figures of these excised fields to the non-liberal arts figures. For the nationally aggregated dataset this left the enrolments in the fields of Political Science and Policy Studies, Studies in Human Society, Behavioural Science, Language and Literature, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Performing Arts, Visual Arts and Crafts, and Communication and Media Studies as comprising enrolments for the liberal arts. Table 2 presents the schedule employed for the nationally aggregated data.

Subjects codified as Liberal Arts	Subjects codified as non-liberal arts
Creative Arts; Performing Arts, Visual Arts and Crafts, Communication and Media Studies. Society and Culture; Political Science and Policy Studies, Studies in Human Society, Behavioural Science, Language and Literature, Philosophy and Religious Studies.	All subjects from; Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies, Architecture and Building, Education, Engineering and Related Technologies, Food, Hospitality and Personal Services, Health, Information Technology, Management and Commerce, Mixed Field Programmes, Natural and Physical Sciences. Creative Arts; Graphic and Design Studies, Other Creative Arts. Society and Culture; Human Welfare Studies and Services, Law, Justice and Law Enforcement, Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies, Economics and Econometrics, Sport and Recreation, Other Society and Culture.

Table 2: National Data Liberal Arts Schedule

For both the Massey University data, and the nationally aggregated data, a codification schedule has been applied in order to differentiate liberal arts and non-liberal arts enrolments.

This codification schedule has been based on a specific understanding of the liberal arts which consists of subjects that are non-scientific, non-vocational, and have a humanist referent. This definition of the liberal arts excludes some subjects which other have attributed as belong to the liberal arts; physics and maths especially (Iverson, 1985). However the liberal arts schedule used in this research reflects the common usage of the term liberal arts.

#### 4.4 Sample Population

The population of the study consists of all students who have enrolled at Massey University at any point between the years 2001 to 2010, and all students who have enrolled in a New Zealand university for the years 2001 to 2010. For the Massey University data the population from which the enrolments were drawn consisted of all intra- extramural students (excluding the possibility that any students were omitted from the dataset due to input error) enrolled at Massey University campuses (the Turitea, Palmerston North; Albany, Auckland; and Wellington campuses). The sample consists of the enrolments of a total of 378,244 students (as students typically study across several years this figure includes the same students enrolling in different years). The total number of unique enrolments for analysis is 1,588,678. The majority of the Massey University sample (84%) are New Zealand citizens, with 16% of the sample consisting of international students. The domestic students originate from a somewhat geographically diverse area, with greater representation from the catchment area of the principle Turitea campus (Manawatu and Wanganui districts).

The national database consisted of 8,753,380 university enrolments over 10 years. An accurate description of the population of students responsible for the enrolments is, however, difficult to generate for a number of reasons. The systems that the Ministry of Education use to quantify the demographic information of students has undergone a number of changes throughout the period of analysis, and some detailed demographic information was only available from the year 2004. Even obtaining the number of students responsible for the enrolments is difficult as the Ministry of Education provides different figures in different

tables. Some figures of total students enrolled by year include students enrolled in institutes of technology and polytechnics, which is not applicable for this analysis, while some tables use different rationales for whether a student is counted in enrolment figures. For example in some tables students are only counted if they qualify as a full time student using the EFTS system which requires at least .8 EFTS, while in other tables students are counted if they achieve a minimum of .25 EFTS. In one case a minimum of .03 EFTS is adequate to be qualified as a student (EFTS is an acronym for 'equivalent full time student' and is the system employed by the Ministry of Education for determining funding for tertiary institutions and support for students). These discrepancies result in some confusion as to the number of students enrolled in universities in any given year, and their demographic information.

Ultimately, this analysis is concerned with the enrolments of students, and not the students themselves. As such, the variation regarding the population of the national dataset does not influence the figures regarding subject enrolment. Those datasets concerned with enrolments in fields of study count each enrolment in a subject discretely, and only one definition of enrolment is used throughout these datasets.

## 4.5 Data Collection

The first dataset used in this analysis has been obtained from the Massey University Headcount & EFTS Management Information (HEMI) datamart. The HEMI system was designed to provide accurate information to Massey University management and other interested parties regarding headcount and enrolment trends across the University (Massey University, 2009). This datamart consists of a number of annual *Microsoft Excel* tables for each college containing detailed information on, amongst other things, the enrolments made by each student at Massey University. The tables used for this research contains all of the data inputted by each student during their matriculation into the university. These tables consist of a list of all of the students enrolled at the university and which papers they enrolled



in for that academic year. Each year's tables for each college were collated into a single yearly *Excel* spread sheet file, which was then checked for any duplication of entries or other errors.

The second data set analysed was obtained from the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The Tertiary Student Enrolment and Completions (TSEC) data are an annually produced series of data sets detailing the enrolments and completions of students in nationally accredited tertiary education providers. The annual TSEC data sets are derived from tertiary institutions SDRs (Single Data Return) which the report required to be submitted to the government in order to arrange any and all EFTS funding, and to arrange student loans and allowances for that institution's students. The dataset employed in this research consists of enrolments from University of Auckland, University of Waikato, Massey University, Victoria University of Wellington, University of Canterbury, Lincoln University, University of Otago, and Auckland University of Technology. This data set is maintained by the Tertiary Sector Performance Analysis and Reporting section of the Ministry of Education. The data is arranged in *Excel* spread sheet format and may be used for public, non-commercial, use (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Given that the datasets contain complete information regarding my object of inquiry my analysis is descriptive, rather than inferential. Using complete information rather than a representative or random sample removes a number of issues around statistical validity and generalisability of results.

#### 4.6 Ethical Considerations

There are two especially pertinent ethical issues relating to this research: the issue of informed consent, and respect for privacy and confidentiality. While the research project does involve the analysis of information provided by participants, informed consent by those participants is not required under the terms of the *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving human participants*. As the approved

Human Ethics application for approval of proposed research/ teaching/ evaluation involving human participants states:

The project is database analysis and hence does not involve direct participation by those recorded in the databases. For this same reason the research has no informed and voluntary consent process for participants. (Wood, 2011).

The other important ethical issue relating to this research relates to section three, paragraph 12 of the *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving human participants*, ‘Respect for privacy and confidentiality involving human participants’, which states:

No participant can be identified without the consent of that participant. [...] Researchers are responsible for keeping information (including the identity of participants) confidential and secure from interception or appropriation by unauthorised persons or for purposes other than the approved research. This will often require coding of data and removal and destruction of identificatory material from questionnaires and other documents. (Massey University, 2010, p. 7)

Accordingly the dataset I have used has been completely anonymised through the removal of all potentially identificatory material. This ensures the requisite anonymity of participants and respect for the privacy of the participants’ data required under the terms of the Massey University Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluation involving human participants.

#### 4.7 Limitations

With research of this nature a number of limitations are evident. Regarding the results of the Massey University enrolment data it must be remembered that no two universities are the same. While universities are generally configured along similar lines in terms of disciplinary structure, the development of each university occurs as a response to unique factors (Niland, 2012). As such, the results of an analysis of enrolment data at one university cannot

necessarily be extrapolated to other universities. This is also true of the national enrolment figures. The tertiary system for each country is also distinct and therefore the results of the national enrolment data can only be applied to the case of New Zealand.

Possibly the greatest limitation for this research is in the codification of liberal arts subjects. As noted earlier, Blaich et al (2004) argue that there is no generally accepted formal definition of what subjects constitute the liberal arts. Neither is there a generally accepted understanding of what should qualify a subject as belonging to the liberal arts. Some have gone so far as to argue that the liberal arts is not able to be codified into specific subjects or programmes at all (Iverson, 1985). Other research which quantifies liberal arts subjects enrolments employ a codification schedule based on a specific rationale. However, these rationales are never identical and can vary greatly in what subjects they include. For this research I employ a codification subject schedule based on a specific understanding of the liberal arts. Therefore the results I obtain in this research are only applicable to the classification schedule I have used in this research. Should a different classification schedule be used with the data enrolment I have obtained then the results will vary accordingly.

Also an issue in this research is that the structure of academic programmes and papers are not necessarily static over time. For example, Massey University enrolments in 133.xxx (Music) drop from 2175 in 2005 to 186 in 2006. This decline occurred as a result of Massey University merging the majority of its music programmes with Victoria University's music programmes to form the New Zealand School of Music. Similarly some subjects begin, and end, within the 2001 to 2010 timeframe. For example Maori Performing Arts (205.xxx) ceases to show any enrolments in 2006, while English Language Studies (192.xxx) begins to take enrolments in 2003.

## 4.8 Conclusion

The methodology used in this research has been constructed around the best possible way of addressing the research question of whether enrolments in liberal arts subjects have decreased in New Zealand for the years 2001 to 2010. The acquisition and nature of the data, the population from which this data was obtained, the codification schema and rationales utilised, and the manner in which analysis occurred have been described in the preceding. While every effort has been made to ensure the requisite rigour of this research, some unavoidable limitations are existent. As with all research involving human participants ethical considerations are a priority and these considerations have been addressed in this research. In the chapter which follows the methodology outlined in this chapter will be employed to consider the nature of trends within liberal arts enrolments, and will determine whether enrolment trends cohere to the predictions made by some scholars.

## Chapter Five: Results

### 5.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the findings of the analysis of enrolment data which seeks to determine whether enrolments in liberal arts subjects experienced a decline, either in relative or absolute terms, between the period 2001 to 2010 in New Zealand. In order to test whether changes in enrolment patterns occurred over the years 2001 to 2010 I have collected, codified, and then graphed enrolment data from Massey University, and the New Zealand database of aggregated university enrolments. The Massey University data consists of a total of 1,575,835 unique enrolments from 2001 – 2010 obtained from the HEMI (Headcount and EFTS Management Information) system maintained by Massey University. The nationally aggregated data is comprised of 8,753,380 unique enrolments over the same period obtained from the Education Counts website (*www.educationcounts.govt.nz*) maintained by the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

The national figures include Massey University's figures. The disaggregation of these figures was not possible due to the complexity of the codification schedule used in the national figures. The analysis of the Massey University data allows for a more detailed understanding of which subjects demonstrated the greatest change over the timeframe, and the more thorough application of the codification schedule used in this research to define liberal arts subjects. The national data was already aggregated into broad fields of study meaning that I could not apply the liberal arts codification schedule in exactly the same manner as the Massey data. However the inclusion of enrolment data from all of the universities in New Zealand has meant that the results are more generalisable than if I had used the Massey University data alone.

I begin by examining the percentage of liberal arts enrolments at Massey University, and across all universities in New Zealand between 2001 and 2010. I then examine liberal arts enrolments in absolute figures. The total enrolment counts between the years 2001 and 2010

are presented. I conclude by looking at the trends of the fields of study within the nationally aggregated university figures.

## 5.2 Liberal Arts Enrolments Relative to Total Enrolments

An important starting point is considering liberal arts enrolments in relation to the total enrolments for the 2001 to 2010 period being investigated. Table 3 presents the longitudinal analysis of enrolment data from Massey University, and the combined enrolments from all universities in New Zealand. This graph charts the percentage of total enrolments that belonged to subjects categorised as liberal arts between 2001 and 2010.

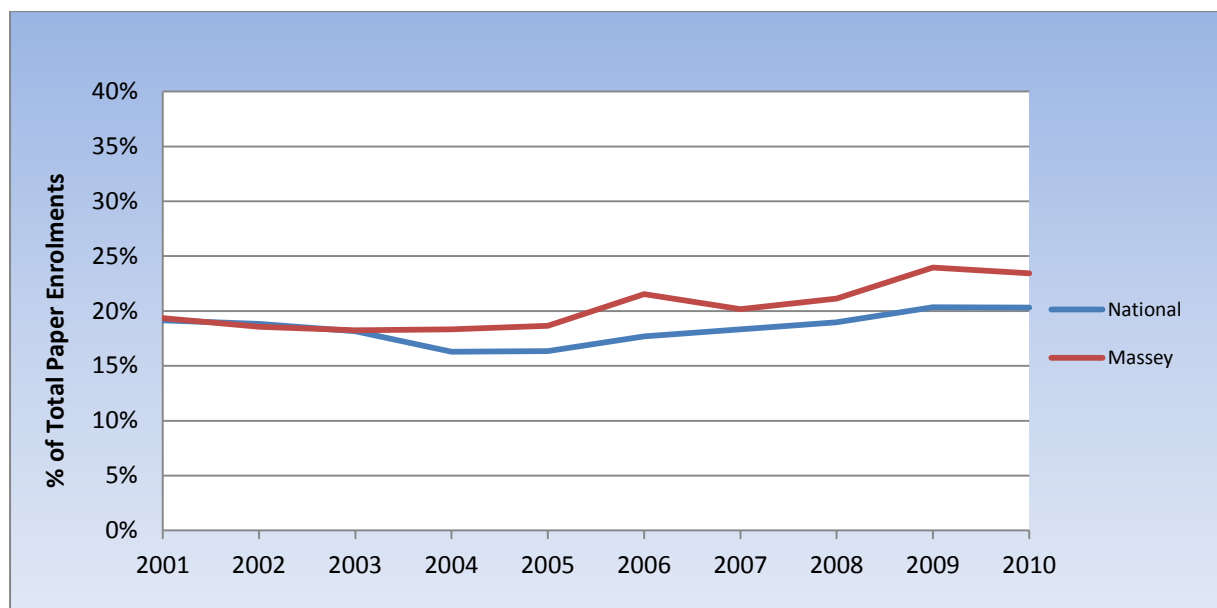


Table 3: Liberal Arts Enrolments as a Percentage of total enrolments 2001 – 2010.

For the ten year period of 2001 – 2010 a slight increase can be observed in the national percentage of enrolments in liberal arts subjects, while a greater increase can be seen in the Massey University percentage of enrolments in liberal arts subjects. Both datasets exhibit a similar trend for the first three years of the period of analysis. In 2001 the national percentage

of enrolments in liberal arts subjects sat at 19.1%, while for Massey University this figure stood at 19.3%. Both percentages drop slightly along a similar trajectory for the next two years until 2003 where the figures sit at 18.1% and 18.2% for the National and Massey University data respectively. From 2004 the percentage figures begin to move apart as the National data drops to 16.2% while the Massey University data increases slightly to 18.6%. From then the National data sees yearly increases until 2009 when the highest figure of 20.33% is seen for the National data. Aside from a decrease in the 2006 – 2007 period the Massey University data climbs yearly from 2003 until again a high is seen in 2009 of 23.9%. The period of analysis ends in 2010 with a national figure of 20.3%, and 23.4% for the Massey University data. For the national data this constitutes an increase of 1.2% in enrolments in liberal arts subjects over the ten year period, while for the Massey University data the increase is 4.1%.

### 5.3 Liberal Arts Enrolments in Absolute Terms

The clear increase in enrolments presented in the preceding Table 3 invites another look at this data, but this time in absolute terms, as enrolment numbers in absolute terms rather than as a percentage of total enrolments. These figures for the period 2001 through 2010 are presented firstly for the national enrolments data (Table 4), and then for Massey University (Table 5). Table 4 looks at total national liberal arts enrolment figures in subjects categorised as liberal arts between 2001 and 2010.

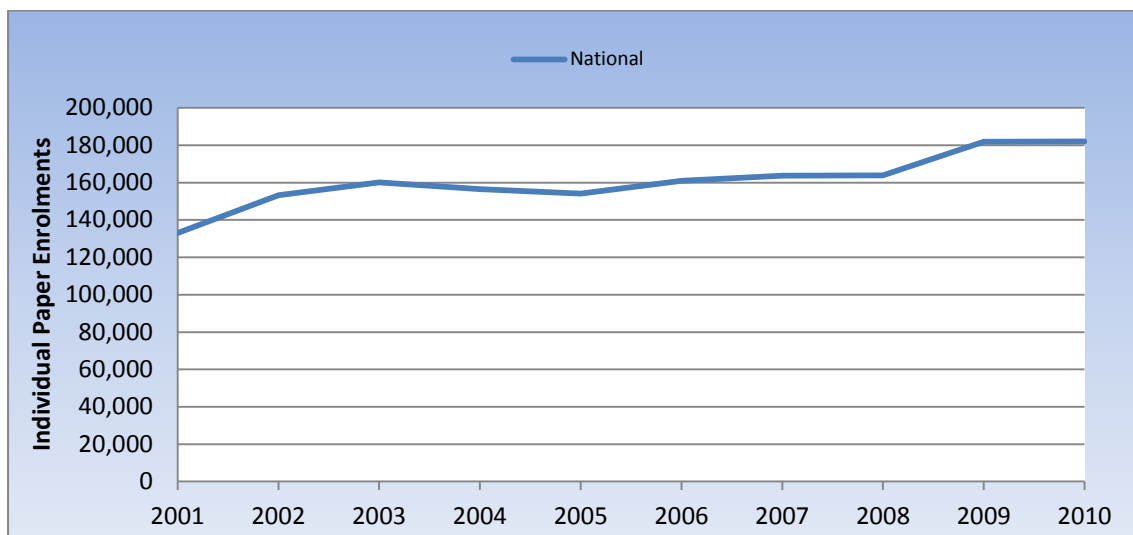


Table 4: Total National Enrolments in Liberal Arts Subjects 2001 – 2010.

In terms of total enrolments in the liberal arts the national data sees an increase over the ten year period. Other than slight decreases in the years 2004 and 2005, enrolments in liberal arts papers increased steadily. The lowest figure in the table can be seen at the beginning of the timeframe, 2001, with 133,080 paper enrolments, with the highest figure occurring at the end of the timeframe, 2010, with 182,080 paper enrolments. This constitutes an increase of 49,000 enrolments in liberal arts subjects, or 36.8%, over the ten year period.



In the following table, Table Five, the total number of subjects categorised as liberal arts subjects at Massey University between 2001 and 2010 are presented.

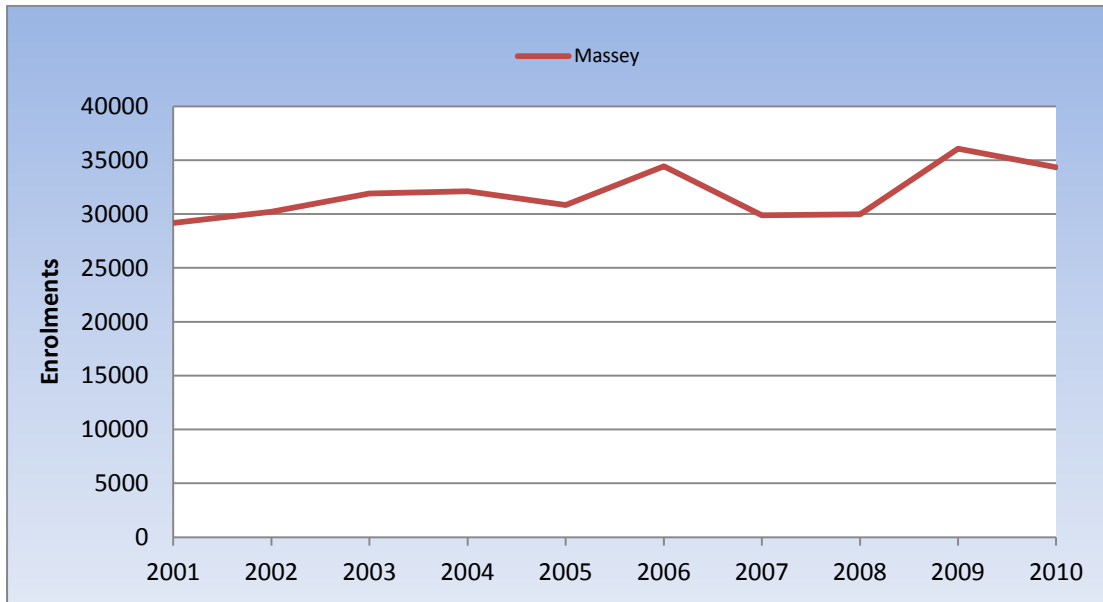


Table 5: Total Massey University Enrolments in Liberal Arts Subjects 2001 – 2010.

The Massey University data also records its lowest figure in 2001; 29,183 enrolments. The Massey University data records three periods of decline as opposed to the one period of decline seen in the national data. The Massey University data records its highest figure over the timeframe in 2009 with 36,075 enrolments in liberal arts subjects. In 2010 there were 34,328 enrolments constituting an increase of 5,145, or 17.6%, enrolments over the ten year period.

## 5.4 Total Paper Enrolments

In Table 6, the total number of enrolments for all university papers in New Zealand between 2001 and 2010 are presented.

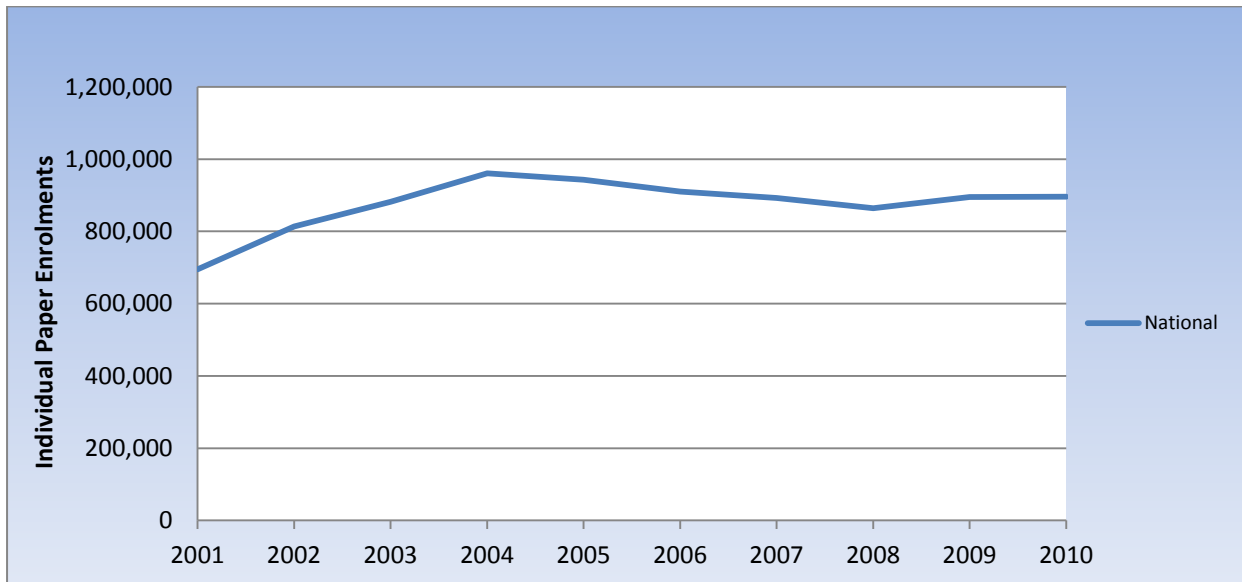


Table 6: Total National Paper Enrolments 2001 – 2010.

Nationally, total paper enrolments across universities were increased across the 2001 – 2010 timeframe. In 2001 total paper enrolments sat at 694,940. National paper enrolments reached a high of 961,000 in 2004, and then decreased slightly to 863,980 in 2008 before levelling off. In 2010 total paper enrolments were 896,550. This constitutes an increase in total paper enrolments over the period 2001 – 2010 of 24.3%, compared with a 36.8% increase (see Table 4) for the liberal arts enrolments across all universities for the same time period. Over the same time frame liberal arts enrolments have increased at a greater rate than total paper enrolments in general. I now look to the Massey University data to see whether this same pattern holds true.

Table 7 presents the total number of enrolments in any paper at Massey University between the years 2001 and 2010.

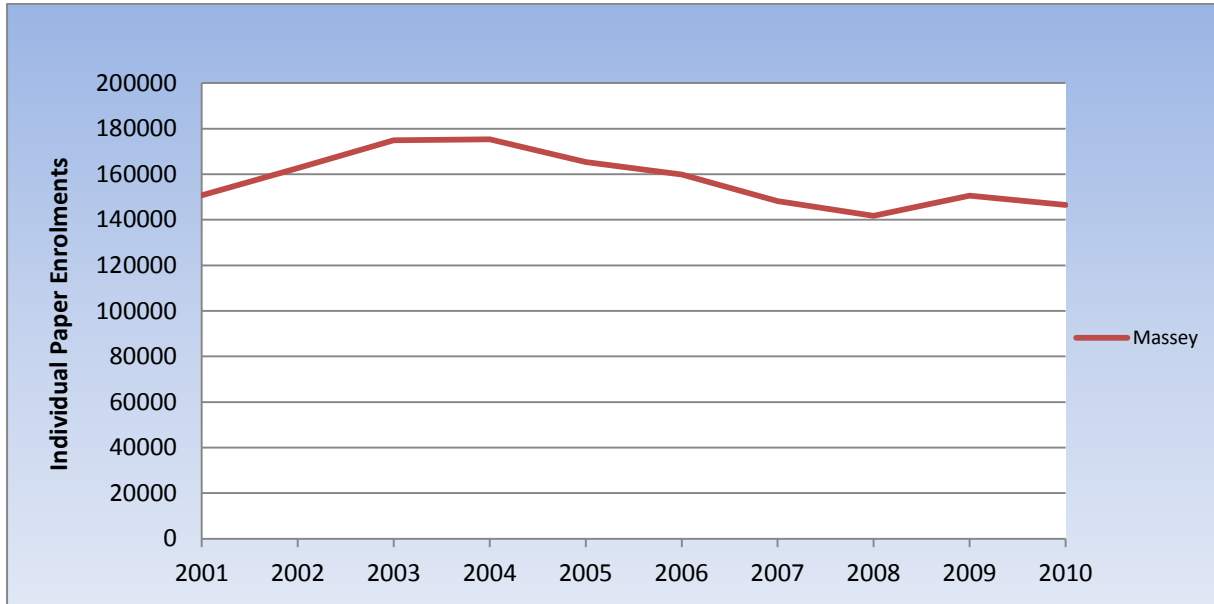


Table 7: Total Massey University Enrolments 2001 – 2010.

The Massey University figures show a similar trend to that seen in the national figures. From 150,732 paper enrolments in 2001 an increase is seen over the next three years until it reaches a peak of 175,285 in 2004. The figure then declines for four consecutive years until 2008, where the low of 141,724 is seen. There is a slight rebound before ending the timeframe with 146,533 total paper enrolments in 2010. Overall, Massey University has experienced a slight decline in total paper enrolments for the period, equating to a 2.7% decline in total enrolments. While this university has experienced a decline overall in enrolments for the time frame, this does not show a direct relationship with liberal arts subjects enrolments as these enrolments in the same timeframe increased by 17.6% (see Table 5).

## 5.5 National Fields of Study

In Table 8 the eight fields which comprise the liberal arts in the nationally aggregated data as a percentage of total enrolments between 2001 and 2010 are presented. To get a better idea of what is behind the data trends, the following table looks at the different areas that constitute the liberal arts in the nationally aggregated data. I have not provided a similar table for the Massey University data due to the dynamic paper arrangement between subjects. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4: Methodology.

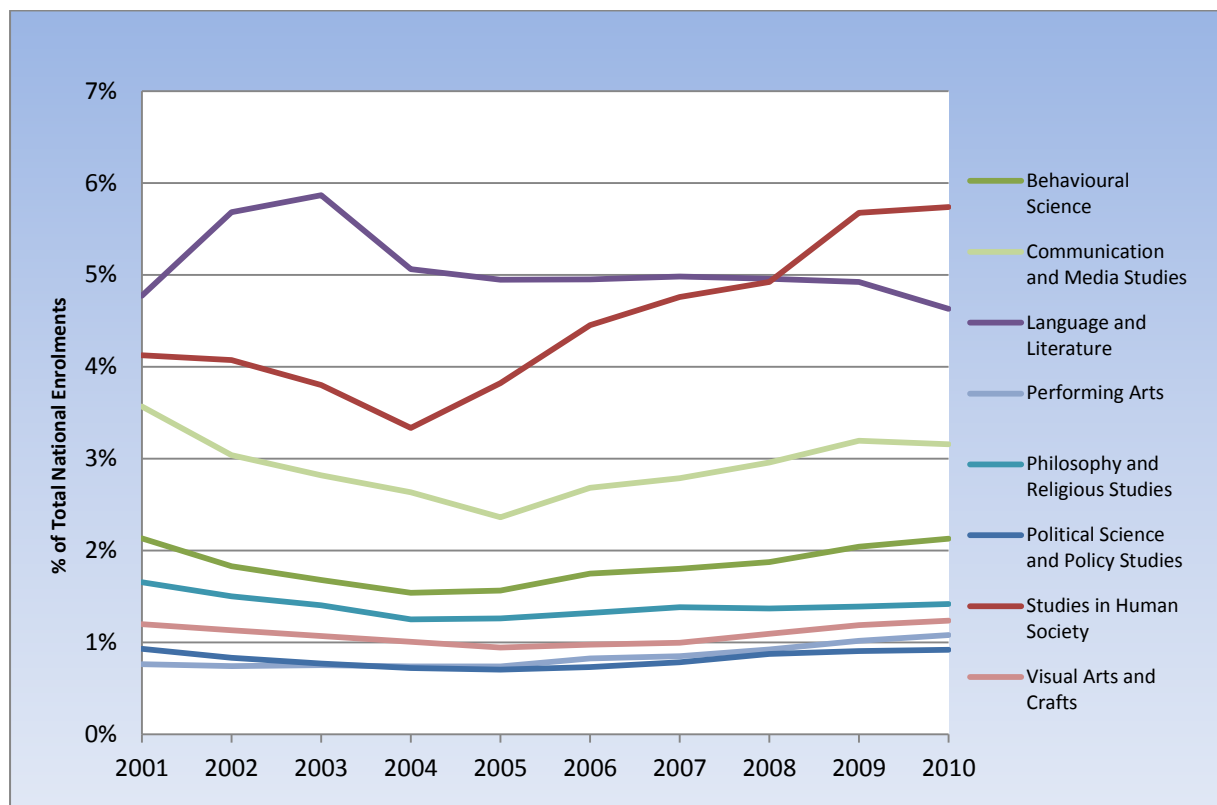


Table 8: National Fields of Study trends as a Percentage of Total Enrolments 2001 – 2010.

With the exception of Language and Literature the liberal arts fields experience a similar pattern of relative decline until the mid 2000s when the figures rebound until the end of the period of analysis. This is most pronounced in the field of Studies in Human Society where its percentage share of enrolments drops from 4.12% in 2001 to a low of 3.33% before

increasing to a high of 5.73% of total paper enrolments in 2010. The exception of Language and Literature is noted where unlike every other field this field sees an immediate and substantial increase at the beginning of the period of analysis from 4.77% in 2001 to a high of 5.8% in 2003, before declining to a low of 4.63% in 2010. Overall, seven fields out of the eight fields comprising the liberal arts have experienced an increase in enrolments as a percentage of all enrolments for the 2001 to 2010 period.

As with previous data, I have provided both relative and absolute measures of the enrolment trend. Table 9 presents the eight fields which comprise the liberal arts in the nationally aggregated data in total enrolments between 2001 to 2010.

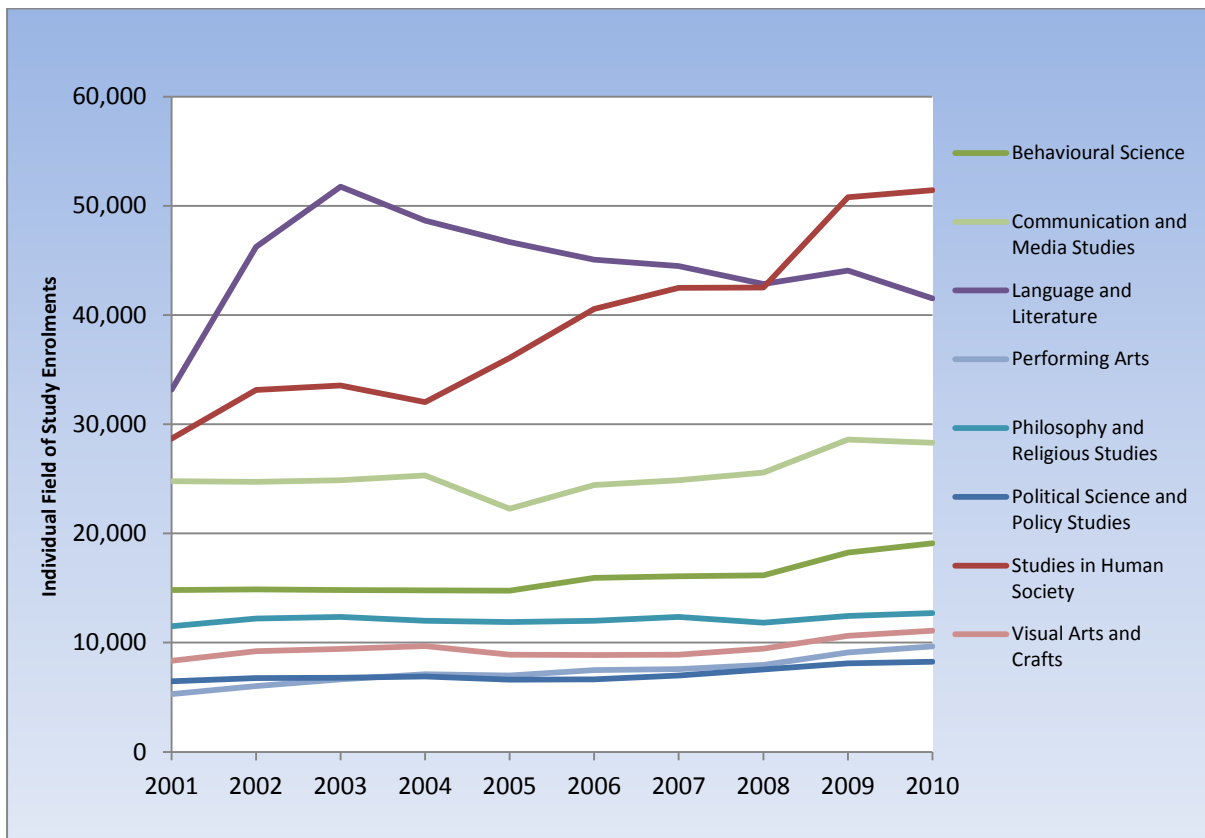


Table 9: Total National Fields of Study 2001 – 2010.

In real terms, every field of study experienced an increased number of enrolments over the ten year period. From 2001 to 2010 individual enrolments in Behavioural Science increased from 14,820 to 19,100 (22.5%); Communication and Media Studies from 24,800 to 28,310

(12.4%); Language and Literature from 33,170 to 41,530 (20.2%); Performing Arts from 5,300 to 9,670 (45.2%); Philosophy and Religious Studies from 11,510 to 12,700 (9.4%); Political Science and Policy Studies increased from 6,470 to 8,240 (21.5%); Studies in Human Society from 28,680 to 51,440 (44.3%), and Visual Arts and Crafts from 8,330 to 11,090 (24.9%).

Behavioural Science, Communication and Media Studies, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Political Science and Policy Studies, and Visual Arts and Crafts all exhibit a similar pattern of gradual and relatively slight incline over the ten year period. While Studies in Human Society and Performing Arts experienced a more pronounced increase of 44.3% and 45.2% respectively over the ten year period. National Language and Literature enrolments see a substantial increase from 2001 to 2003 of 18,590 from 33,170 to 51,760 (36% from 2001 - 2003), before declining to 41,530 individual enrolments in 2010 (-19.8% from 2003 – 2010). Overall, all eight fields which comprise the liberal arts experienced an increase in total enrolments over the 2001 to 2010.

## 5.6 Conclusion

According to the analysis of enrolment data from Massey University and across all universities across New Zealand liberal arts enrolments increased over the period 2001 to 2010; in both real terms, and relative to total enrolments. Between 2001 and 2010 the percentage of national enrolments in liberal arts subjects decreased initially before rebounding to the end the period with a modest increase in the share of total enrolments. For Massey University we see a greater increase of the share of liberal arts enrolments within this period. As well as increasing their share of total enrolments, subjects in the liberal arts at both Massey University and nationally also experienced an increase in actual enrolments.

The observed increases in liberal arts enrolments occurred at a time characterised by the emergence of neoliberal ideologies and increasing material constraints on pursuing university

education (Berg & Roche, 1997; Olssen, 2002). Rather than moving away from liberal arts subjects, students continue to participate in this tradition of knowledge despite its non-vocational nature. In the final chapter I consider these results with respect to the notion that the liberal arts would decline as a result of students being more vocationally orientated in their selection of education.

## Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

Since the mid-1980s the New Zealand tertiary system has been the site of a series of extensive reforms. Based on a neoliberal ideology which emphasised economic rationalism these reforms were primarily concerned with decreasing the cost of resourcing public universities, while increasing the economic benefits for the state afforded by university education. For students this meant that tuition fees for New Zealand citizens were introduced and subsequently increased, governmental support for living costs was limited, and often had to be repaid. Discursively, university education was increasingly framed as an economic activity in policy documents by successive governments (Codd, 2001; Higgins et al 2012). Critics of these reforms, and reforms occurring along similar lines in other countries, argued that a natural consequence of decreasing support for students to pursue university study, and the increasing framing of university education as purely vocational, would be that the liberal arts would see a continual decrease in enrolments (Axelrod, 1998; Corson, 2000; Roberts, 1999; Skolnik, 1998).

In order to test whether liberal arts enrolments declined between the years 2001 to 2010 enrolments for Massey University and all of the universities in New Zealand were collected, codified as either liberal arts or not liberal arts, and then analysed. The results of this analysis show that over the period 2001 to 2010 enrolments in liberal arts subjects experienced increases at both Massey University and on average across all universities in New Zealand. This increase occurred despite successive Labour and National governments implementing policies which increased the cost to the student of higher education, and the explicit gearing of tertiary policy towards training for employment. This increase also occurred during a time when neoliberal ideologies of economic rationalisation became increasingly dominant (Brown, 2003; Nairn, Higgins, & Sligo, 2012; Olssen, 2002). While the notion that liberal arts enrolments would decline as a result of neoliberal reform is intuitively tempting, the results of the analysis of enrolments show it to be spurious. An examination of some of the arguments made which predict a decrease in liberal arts enrolments shows that these



arguments not only lack empirical evidence, but they also lack a rational understanding of how neoliberal interpellation occurs, and how and why students opt for their university study.

A number of critics who predicted a decline in liberal arts enrolments argued that students were ultimately responsible for the purported decline of this body of learning (Giroux, 2002; Roberts, 1999; Saunders, 2007). It was argued that a consequence of neoliberal reform would be the inculcation of neoliberal values in the citizenry; especially young people who have been entirely raised during a period of neoliberal governance. As young people chose their university study they would choose areas of study which would provide them with the greatest economic benefits and abandon the non-vocational areas of study in the liberal arts (Giroux, 2002; Roberts, 1999).

However, this notion of the calculating, economically self-interested ‘entrepreneurial student’ is not supported by evidence. A considerable body of research, both international and from New Zealand, shows that university students continue to be more influenced in their enrolment choices by interest, rather than financial gain (Buissink-Smith et al, 2010; Carter, 2006; Kim et al, 2002; Keshishian et al, 2010; Malgwi et al, 2005; Matusovich et al, 2010; Tan & Laswad, 2009). My own research shows that enrolments in the liberal arts have remained relatively stable and there has been no evident shift away from the liberal arts, towards more vocational subjects.

Recent research from New Zealand shows that while young people are influenced by neoliberal discourses, especially economic rationalism, these discourses do not wholly construct their identity in the manner suggested by critics. Rather, young people negotiate neoliberal notions of economic rationalism alongside a host of other discourses. It is hoped that this research might, in some small way, help redress the erroneous conceptualisation of contemporary university students that is prevalent in literature on the university after neoliberal reform.

In this final chapter, I consider the notion of the neoliberal subject position, and problems with this notion, in an attempt to explain the findings of this research: that the liberal arts in

New Zealand have not suffered a decline, at least in the period 2001 to 2010, and therefore the neoliberal ideology permeating New Zealand Government tertiary education policy since the mid-1980s has not resulted in a shift away from the liberal arts toward vocational studies. To try and understand this, research that has looked directly at students' reasons for choosing their paths of study in a range of areas is considered. Following from this, I outline the contribution that this research makes, and I provide possible paths for future research projects. I end this work with an expression of hope for the vulnerable institutions, such as liberal arts education, that are felt to be at threat by the encroachment of neoliberal ideology.

## 6.2 The Neoliberal Subject Position

According to Giroux (2002), Kuh (1999), Roberts (1999), and Saunders (2007, 2010) a manifestation of the rise of neoliberal ideology is that university students will increasingly employ calculative and instrumental decision making processes in their selection of university study. It is argued that university students will increasingly opt for profitable vocationally orientated study paths over the less vocationally orientated study paths found in the humanities and liberal arts. For these critics this shift occurs due to neoliberalism's construction of the neoliberal subject position.

Within Rose's (1999) highly influential work analysing the nature and effects of neoliberalism the main argument is that prominent organisations and nation states are attempting to advocate, through a variety of strategies, a new dominant subject position; the neoliberal subject. The neoliberal subject is characterised above all else by an attendance to rational decision making especially in regards to economic self-interest;

All manner of social undertakings – health, welfare, education, insurance – can be reconstrued in terms of their contribution to the development of human capital. Their internal organization can be reshaped in enterprise form. And the paths chosen by rational and enterprising individuals can be shaped by acting upon the external contingencies that are factored into

calculations. The notion of enterprise thus entails a distinct conception of the human actor – no longer the nineteenth-century economic subject of interests but an entrepreneur of his or her self. (Rose, 1999, pp. 141 – 142)

This emphasis on economic rationalism within the neoliberal subjects overrides and replaces the previously held distinction between the domain of economics, and the domain of the non-economic. Culture, social mores, civic responsibility, personal ethics, and even morality are superseded by the amoral exchange of the market. In regards to education the consequences are obvious;

Education is no longer confined to ‘schooling’, with its specialized institutional sites and discrete biographical locus. The disciplinary individualization and normalization of the school sought to install, once and for all, the capacities and competencies for social citizenship. But a new set of educational obligations are emerging that are not confined in space and time in the same ways. The new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of incessant job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self (Rose, 1999, pp. 160 – 161)

For the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject the role of education, especially post-compulsory education, is to acquire those skills and credentials which will allow the subject to profit. The notion of learning for interest, or personal growth, is wholly replaced by instrumental, vocational, functions of education (Rose, 1999).

This notion that a feature of neoliberal governance is the construction of the entrepreneurial subject is echoed throughout discussions on neoliberalism. For Brown (2003) the neoliberal subject is defined by an adherence to economic rationalism as the basis for decision making; “The extension of market rationality to every sphere, and especially the reduction of moral and political judgement to a cost/benefit calculus” (p. 16). As with Rose (1999), Brown (2003) argues that for the neoliberal subject economic rationalism supersedes all other factors in decision making and is applied calculatedly to all aspects of life;

The political sphere, along with every other dimension of contemporary existence, is submitted to an economic rationality, or put the other way around, not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo economicus*, all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality. While this entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality. (Brown, 2003, p. 15)

While Rose (1999) presents the notion of the neoliberal subject as a not yet realised ideal for neoliberal governance, something of a work in progress, Brown (2003) argues that this subject position has already been realised, and points towards the university as evidence;

Other evidence for progress in the development of such a [neoliberal] citizenry is not far from hand: consider the market rationality permeating universities today, from admissions and recruiting to the relentless consumer mentality of students in relationship to university brand names, courses, and services (Brown, 2003, p. 15).

The notion that neoliberalism constructs the self-interested neoliberal subject is not limited to Rose's (1999) analysis of the United Kingdom, or Brown's (2003) analysis of the United States. Drawing heavily on the preceding authors Davies and Bansel (2007) argue that within New Zealand and Australia neoliberal reforms have produced economically rationalist, highly entrepreneurial subjects;

The belief that the market should direct the fate of human beings (rather than that human beings should direct the economy) has come to seem, through the installation and operationalization of neoliberal discourses and practices, a natural, normal and desirable condition of humankind (p. 253)

For Davies and Bansel (2007) the education sector in New Zealand and Australia is not only a site which is affected by neoliberal ideologies through reforms in funding, and changes in how staff are managed. The university is also seen as an engine for the inculcation of neoliberal ideologies in young people which produces the economically centred neoliberal subject; "Schools and universities have arguably been reconfigured to produce the highly

individualized, responsabilized subjects who have become entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248).

Yet however popular the notion of the contemporary university student as becoming increasingly motivated by economic motivations in their decision making processes is, this belief is not supported by the longitudinal analysis of enrolment data which shows that enrolments in non-vocational liberal arts papers has increased between the years 2001 to 2010. This assertion is also not supported by a body of literature concerning how and why contemporary students choose the nature of their higher education.

### 6.3 Problems with the Notion of the Neoliberal Subject

A considerable body of research exists that shows that for the majority of contemporary university students, both internationally and in New Zealand, interest in a subject, rather than economic imperatives, is the main influence for choosing to study in particular subjects (Buissink-Smith et al, 2010; Carter, 2006; Kim et al, 2002; Keshishian et al, 2010; Malgwi et al, 2005; Matusovich et al, 2010; Tan & Laswad, 2009). Rather than research the motivations for why students choose to partake in higher education, a number of critics have instead made a number of assumptions predicated on an out of touch, chauvinistic and reactionary view of contemporary students. For those of us, including myself, who have studied liberal arts subjects it is tempting to speculate that while we chose our subjects due to interest and a belief in the importance of our subjects, those who study in vocational areas chose their subjects due to less enlightened reasons; such as a purely instrumental view of higher education. However interest as the prime motivation for selection of study is not limited to liberal arts subjects. Research shows that student selection of highly vocational courses is primarily motivated by an interest in that subject (Buissink-Smith et al, 2010; Carter, 2006; Kim et al, 2002; Keshishian et al, 2010; Malgwi et al, 2005; Matusovich et al, 2010; Tan & Laswad, 2009).

The body of research into why students choose their paths of study, as well as the analysis of enrolment data that I undertook, suggests that students have not been inculcated into the highly calculative and economic rationalist subject positions expected from Brown (2003), Davies & Bansel (2007), Roberts (1999), and Rose (1999) as a result of the rise of neoliberal ideologies. However the question remains, if we accept Rose's (1999) proposition that an influential set of principles, values, and practices have emerged over the past three decades referred to as neoliberalism is correct. And we correspondingly assume that a feature of this neoliberalism is the construction and advocacy of the economically self-interested, entrepreneurial subject (Brown, 2003; Giroux, 2002). Then how can we explain the tendency for contemporary students to choose study based on interest rather than vocational factors, and the lack of a decline in liberal arts enrolments?

One explanation for this counter intuitive result can be found in the work of Nairn and Higgins (2007), and Nairn, Higgins, and Sligo (2012), who have researched the transition of young people out of compulsory education in New Zealand during a time characterised by neoliberal interpellation of economic rationalist values. Their research found that rather than wholly incorporating neoliberal values, young people negotiate neoliberal discourses amongst a host of competing discourses. In their 2007 paper *New Zealand's neoliberal generation: tracing discourses of economic (ir)rationality* Nairn and Higgins (2007) attempt to understand the motivations of young New Zealanders to reject economic rationalist decision making despite "being the first generation to have grown up entirely within one of the most intensive and comprehensive experiments in neoliberalism to take place in the OECD" (p. 261).

Their research found that young people did not exhibit the type of purely instrumental thinking discussed by Roberts (1999) or Saunders (2007). In interviews with five young New Zealanders in the process of leaving high school Nairn and Higgins (2007) found that in discussing their post high school futures some participants did express the sort of rational economic motivations that might be expected of the neoliberal subject (it is worth considering whether such economic motivations are an entirely new phenomenon that has occurred as a result of neoliberalism). However they also found that each of the participants also expressed desires that were economically irrational and therefore antithetical to the notion of the calculative entrepreneurial subject:

Assumptions that the neoliberal subject is only rational and economically motivated ignore motivations that are irrational and uneconomic. In identifying the economically rational and (apparently) irrational storylines of [the] participants, we acknowledge neoliberalism's weighty imposition but attempt a discursive intervention by indicating how these participants' storylines also exceed the economic confines of neoliberal discourses (Nairn & Higgins, 2007, p. 267)

The young people interviewed by Nairn and Higgins (2007) are impelled by a variety of motivations that are not confined to purely economically instrumental ends. Social, cultural, and religious motivations compete with neoliberal discourses within the participants to create a tension between that which is profitable, and the participants own desires:

In our theorizing we have shown how our participants talked as neoliberal subjects *and* as acting subjects motivated as much by *how they wanted to be in relation to others* (such as friends, children, God, partners, and people they worked for and with), as by their own individual desires for economic well-being. In tracing discourses of choice and self-reliance, we came to understand that the young people in our study were not only *subject to* the individualizing impetus of neoliberal discourses but were also *social subjects* propelled by desires to help, be happy and have fun [original emphasis]. (Nairn & Higgins, p. 279 – 280)

In their follow up work *Children of Rogernomics: A neoliberal generation leaves school* Nairn, Higgins, and Sligo (2012) interviewed 93 young New Zealanders with the intention to “explore how the generation born into this evolving [neoliberal] landscape grappled with crafting identities and futures for themselves, particular as they made the transition from school to their post-school lives in the mid-2000s” (p. 11). As with their earlier research Nairn et al (2012) found that a number of their participants, especially the young men, exhibited discourses of entrepreneurialism and enterprise in their plans for the future. However these young people equally exhibited discourses of autonomy and freedom which often competed against those entrepreneurial discourses;

The discourse of enterprise and entrepreneurialism employed by these [...] participants, was no so totalising in the sense of dictating or fully constituting their subjectivities [...]. Their talk was shot through with contradictions and tensions within this discourse: they were adept at

skillfully appropriating those concepts which allowed them room to manoeuvre and negotiate their own understandings within their particular worlds (Nairn et al, 2012, p. 125).

An awareness of the entrepreneurial ideology inherent in neoliberalism does not equate to an adoption of this ideology; either for critics of neoliberalism, or for the young people raised during a time characterised by neoliberal reform.

Throughout the interviews participants repeatedly expressed a conscious rejection of the economic rationalist route in favour of other options (Nairn et al, 2012). For some participants this meant starting a family rather than entering the workforce: choosing more personally rewarding work, such as working with charities and working in the creative arts, over better paying but less desirable careers, constructing identities which expressly rejected economic motive in favour of identities based around church and religion. In their hopes for the future participants typically expressed a desire to make money and prosper financially, but this desire was secondary to a desire to work in areas that were personally rewarding, or fun, or that they believed to be important;

In the expressions of hopes and dreams, it is clear that the discourse of enterprise and the entrepreneurial self is not a totalising discourse: these individuals work, rework, and challenge the discourses of entrepreneurialism and meritocracy in interesting ways according to the discourses, both discursive and material, available to them (Nairn et al, 2012, p. 113)

What was conspicuously absent from the vast majority of participants interviews was the self-interested highly calculative decision making expected by both the tenets of neoliberalism, and the critics of neoliberalism discussed earlier. Other than somewhat vague ideas about hopefully making money in the future, having fun, travelling, starting a family etcetera, the majority of participants had not plotted their life trajectories with quite the enthusiasm expected of the neoliberal subject. Indeed the idea of a set vocational trajectory was expressly rejected by some participants (Nairn et al, 2012). This notion was encapsulated by one participant when asked what advice she would offer other young people in their transition from compulsory education to their adult lives;



Don't be really set on what you're going to do, 'cause it doesn't happen like [that]. I mean, it's really good to have ideas about what you want to do, but it doesn't often come about in the exact same way that you think it will.

Yeah, be prepared [for] the unexpected stuff and to kind of just go along with that. I think the whole strength thing is really important; you know everything else around you is going to keep on changing for the next few years so being strong within yourself and taking that time to know who you are and work that stuff out is really important, so that the other stuff doesn't really throw you, yeah.

I think, yeah and keep having fun with it, 'cause it does feel really like as soon as you come out of school, you know, 'what are you going to do?'. Rather than 'who are you going to be?' and 'how are you going to live your life?' its 'what are you going to do?' I think that focus is something I would kind of advise against, yeah (Nairn et al, 2012, p. 172)

In their own analysis of young people leaving high school in Britain, Ball, Macrae, and Maguire (1999) found that the decision making for the majority of participants “bear little resemblance to the calculative, individualistic, consumer rationalism that predominate in official texts” (p. 201). While a number of policy reforms in New Zealand have occurred which attempted to position higher education as a financial investment, and which simultaneously attempted to position students as self-interested entrepreneurs, “policy assumptions do not necessarily mesh well with the lived experience of [...] young people” (Nairn & Higgins, 2007, p. 350). As Higgins (2002) notes;

Education/training and work are only one part of young people's lives, and not always the most important in terms of how they see themselves [...] On the contrary, their choices are embedded in social and familial relationships. They are not rational choices in any simple sense, nor educational and vocational in any simple sense. They are about and invested in identities and opportunity. They are framed and formed by key events, moments and influences [and] various significant others (p. 56).

Inherent in the reasoning of those who argue that a natural consequence of neoliberalism is that university students will increasingly opt for more vocational paths of study, is the idea that people unresistingly accept totalising neoliberal ideologies (Astin, 1998; Brown, 2003; Kuh, 1999; Reid, 2002; Rhoades, 2003; Roberts, 1999; Saunders, 2007/ 2010). However, the assumption that neoliberalism is best understood as a top down impositional discourse does

not explain why people do not necessarily act as neoliberal subjects (Larner, 2003). As the research from Nairn and Higgins (2007) and Nairn et al (2012) shows, for young New Zealanders neoliberal ideologies of economic rationalism do not wholly constitute either their decision making processes or their identities. Rather, economic rationalist discourses compete with other factors such as desires, interests, culture, tradition, religion, family, geographical location and, ironically, neoliberal notions of freedom and autonomy.

#### 6.4 Neoliberalism and the Liberal Arts

As my analysis has shown liberal arts enrolments at Massey University, and across the country, have remained relatively stable between the 2001 and 2010 period of analysis; even increasing somewhat. Whatever the threat of neoliberalism is within the university, and it is evident that such a threat does exist, it cannot be said that it has resulted in students deserting the liberal arts *en masse*. This has occurred despite successive governments attempting to push students towards vocational university.

Since 1984 New Zealand tertiary policy has been engineered towards directing students and universities towards vocational and economically instrumental forms of higher education (Olssen, 2002). Prior to the neoliberal reforms that occurred in the 1980s, policy documents regarding university education recognised the myriad of important, non-economic benefits afforded by higher education. After the initiation of neoliberal reforms in New Zealand university education was increasingly characterised as an economic investment, resulting in individual financial gains, and a contribution to the ‘knowledge society’ through the acquisition of vocational skills which would meet the demands of industry and commerce (Nairn et al, 2012). As well as discursive differences regarding university education, material restraints on higher education also occurred through the implementation and gradual increase of tuition, and the requirement to repay living costs that resulted as a consequence of study (Nairn et al, 2012). The increasing cost of university education was seen as especially detrimental to the liberal arts, as it was felt that the costs of higher education would dissuade

students to enrol in anything other than expressly vocational programs of study which would help recoup the costs associated with study (Roberts, 1999)

However, even in the face of increasing financial restrictions to higher education, and the advocacy of an individualising ideology which promotes vocational higher education, students consistently continue to enrol in those subjects and areas which contribute to the social and cultural growth of our society, and the personal intellectual growth of students. These results demonstrate quite the opposite of the pessimistic characterisation of millennial university students proposed by some (Giroux, 2002; Roberts, 1999; Saunders, 2007).

While this is certainly good news for the liberal arts, the notion that liberal arts enrolments are falling seems to have entered the conscience collective at some point and evidence to contrary is met with scepticism. Berube (2011) writes that the idea that English enrolments are falling is so deeply ingrained that when enrolment data which proves otherwise is presented the response is invariably disbelief and denial. Berube (2011) argues that;

This disbelief itself, I now believe, is an important sign of the state of the profession, namely, that we continue to talk of an enrolment crisis even though there is no enrolment crisis. Obviously, we must be clinically depressed. We continue to tell ourselves, our readers, and our administrations that we've fallen, fallen utterly into despair and disrepair (p. 21).

This is not a new phenomenon. The imminent death of the liberal arts has been variously attributed to World War 2, the culture and theory wars of the 1980s, Marxism, the discipline of engineering, Sputnik, over specialisation of disciplines, the natural sciences, disciplinary insularity, declining public support, and now neoliberalism (Bell, 2010; Berube, 2011; Skolnik, 1998). That is certainly not to say that neoliberal ideologies are good for the liberal arts, but that the relationship between the emergence of neoliberal ideology, and the attendant decline of liberal arts enrolments, is not as straightforward as critics would suggest. While we may have an understanding of how neoliberalism has emerged in New Zealand, and the shape it takes in policy documents, it is less clear exactly what manifestations neoliberal ideology will ultimately take;

Although neoliberalism may have a clear intellectual genesis, it arrives in different places in different ways, articulates with other political projects, takes multiple material forms, and can give rise to unexpected outcomes (Larner, 2003, p. 512)

The continued interest in the liberal arts in New Zealand universities, despite the obstacles presented by neoliberal governance, constitutes such an “unexpected outcome”. Rather than acquiesce to notions of economic self-interest, students remain committed to pursuing those paths of study of the kind for which they are best fitted, and which they can apply the fullest extent of their powers.

## 6.5 The contribution of this Study

A great deal has been written about neoliberalism within the social sciences; especially in regards to the university. The notion that the emergence of neoliberalism would result in the marginalisation of the liberal arts was found to be intuitively tempting to a number of critics. But while writers on neoliberalism have made a number of quite drastic statements and predictions regarding the decline of the liberal arts and the entrepreneurial tendencies of contemporary students, a lack of empirical evidence to support this notion is evident. As my review of how university students primarily choose their education based on interest shows, empirical evidence to the contrary is readily available, but discreetly ignored.

In his analysis of the effect of neoliberalism in Eastern European politics Ganev (2006) argues that discussions critiquing neoliberalism are uniquely devoid of the empirical evidence which scholars demand in every other academic endeavour. Instead a vast host of incredibly complex socio-political phenomena is attributed to the “ideological fanaticism of a small group of democratically elected, temporarily empowered, and constitutionally constrained,

politicians [which purportedly] triggered massive social, political, and economic changes” (Ganev, 2006, p. 347). For example, in *Understanding and Interrupting Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism in Education*, Apple (2006) argues that advocacy of neoliberal ideology is presented without empirical evidence;

If everyone acted in such an “economically rational” way, the common good would somehow take care of itself. Such a process is seen as “wealth creating.” Of course, these arguments need to be supported by empirical evidence, evidence that often simply does not exist (p.23)

Remarkably then, Apple’s (2006) entire paper does not present empirical evidence once to support a raft of claims regarding neoliberalism; claims to the effect that a fundamental shift in our civilisation has occurred with profound implications for every living person. Empirical evidence might be required to advocate neoliberalism, but to criticise it apparently requires none. Throughout literature discussing neoliberalism scholars reduce social inquiry to simply naming things that they dislike as effects of neoliberalism without overburdening their arguments with empirical evidence. This makes a mockery of the science of understanding the etiology of social phenomena through the interpretation of empirical evidence and application of theoretical rigour. Better understanding how neoliberalism affects social processes through the analysis of evidence, rather than echoing popular yet untrue sentiments on the topic, will give us a better understanding of the effects of neoliberalism.

It is also hoped that this work might help redress the spurious characterisation of contemporary students evident in so much discussion regarding higher education after neoliberal reform. The notion that the university would be overrun by students interested only in their own financial gain amounts to little more than paranoid delusion by a reactionary professoriate. Throughout such literature a theme of ‘Kids today are just no good... back in my day...’ is evident. To quote Roberts (1999) rather excellent characterisation of ‘today’s young people’, which constitutes much of the evidence for claims that young people are embracing neoliberal ideology; “there are already signs – prevalent in popular youth culture [...] of an emerging distaste (perhaps even a repugnance) for things past.” (p. 72). This is indeed a grave portent of things to come.

Millennial students, like in every preceding generation, negotiate their lives in myriad complex ways that cannot be reduced to the acquiescence of an impositional ideology. It is true that some students opt for university education based on vocational ends. But this neither a bad thing, nor is it a new thing. Again, paranoid delusions are substituted for evidence in discussions regarding the lived experience of students. This is neither fair, nor accurate.

## 6.6 Future Research

While I do not concur with Saunder's (2007, 2010) characterisation of contemporary students, I agree with his sentiment that a lacuna exists regarding how changes to the post-compulsory education sector have affected students. A substantial body of literature exists detailing the neoliberal reforms within New Zealand and how they have affected the operation of universities, and the academic staff within universities. However, it is incredibly rare to find any mention of how these changes might affect students, other than those occasional bouts of irrational hostility that I have discussed. I noted with irony that the National Party's 1998 White Paper on tertiary education, widely heralded at the time as an expression of pure neoliberal ideology, was both more sympathetic to students, and more concerned with the lived experience of students, than any of the critiques written by academics (Ministry of Education, 1998; McLaughlin, 2003; Olssen, 2002; Peters and Roberts, 1999). If we consider the education of students as a fundamental element and function of universities, then the ease in which students are utterly disassociated from discussions regarding universities is troubling.

The logical direction for future research after determining that students continue to opt for a liberal arts education, would be to determine why students opt for a liberal arts education. As discussed, significant obstacles have been put in place which, in theory, should have pushed students towards vocational areas of study. As this did not occur, future research into why liberal arts students chose to enrol in liberal arts subject might help explain the continued interest in this body of learning.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This research set out to consider the state of the liberal arts within New Zealand during a time characterised by neoliberal reform in general, and within the tertiary sector specifically. A number of critics had made the intuitively tempting argument that a feature of social change during late modernity would be a decline in liberal arts and an attendant increase in vocational forms of education. For many writers the mechanism for this decrease in liberal arts enrolments was that the inculcation of neoliberal values in young people would result in greater economic rationalist decision making and therefore greater vocational enrolments. Within New Zealand, between 1984 and 2007 governmental policy geared, or attempted to gear, public universities towards providing expressly vocational education in order to best serve industrial and commercial interests.

However, as my research has shown there has been no great swing away from liberal arts subjects during the 2001 – 2010 timeframe in New Zealand; either at Massey University, or across the nations universities. When we consider why, and how, students choose their educational paths we see that the contemporary student is primarily motivated by interest in the subject, and not economic factors. Recent research from New Zealand reveals that rather than purely accepting neoliberal notions of economic rationalism as being fundamental in their decision making, young people navigate the entrepreneurial discourse as one of many competing discourses.

While the research from Nairn et al (2007, 2012) may help explain why enrolments in liberal arts have not decreased, it is more difficult to conclude why there has been a slight increase, in both relative and absolute terms, in liberal arts enrolments over the 2001 to 2010 timeframe. It is not the goal of this research to argue that neoliberalism is of benefit to liberal arts enrolments. Indeed, my initial assumption was that liberal arts enrolments would see a slight decline over the years 2001 to 2010 as a result of the pervasive and corrosive effects of neoliberal ideology in governmental policy. It is possible that the relatively short length of the period of analysis could be responsible for the counter-intuitive results. The period before

the time frame could have conceivably seen much higher liberal arts enrolments, thus the 2001 – 2010 figures could constitute a drop off in these enrolments. However a more plausible explanation is that the students of New Zealand universities do not necessarily do what is expected of them by either advocates of neoliberalism, critics of neoliberalism, or social science researchers.

I conclude with the desire that this research is not seen as a defence of neoliberalism, or of neoliberal reform within the university. But rather that hope remains for the social and cultural institutions, traditions, and mores that are seen to be especially vulnerable to the bulldozing, self-perpetuating economic rationalist and individualising logic of neoliberalism.



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