

CAPITAL CITY NEEDS VIBRANT UNIVERSITY

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English

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I did my BA at Victoria University in the early 1990s. My major was theatre and film studies, but I took as many different courses as I could; Anthropology, Religious studies, Classical studies, Art History, Theatre History, Film Analysis, New Zealand literature.

I loved learning about the world through those different lenses; studying Italian Renaissance Art was also a way of looking at the power of the church in Europe, I learned all about Islam and eastern religions, about how French new-wave cinema influenced Hollywood, I wrote an essay arguing that New Zealand's early feature film industry was effectively variations on the "man alone" theme, Kiwi men running away into the bush for one reason or another, often with a gun.

Many of those courses I took are now under review, with the university confirming this week it is cutting 230 jobs and proposing to discontinue some courses, including several languages altogether.

It's pretty devastating.

As we grapple with the impacts of disinformation and misinformation and the rise of hate against vulnerable groups, education is more important than ever. As is curiosity and empathy.

The world is changing rapidly, artificial intelligence really is taking some of our jobs, and it may well be those good old humanities subjects that may give us the best chance of adapting to all this change.

Studying history gives us an understanding of what has come before and what we can learn from it, sociology helps us understand how society reacts to huge upheavals, literature allows us to walk in someone else's shoes. I don't even have words to describe the importance of music and art.

Of course, it's not all humanities subjects that are going - there are cuts across a wide range of important subjects such as geophysics, design technology and possibly the most baffling of all, secondary teacher education - at a time when we are desperate for more teachers.

It's pretty easy to see what the impact of the cuts will be on the university as a whole - fewer courses mean fewer students and the downward spiral continues.

A capital city needs a functioning, strong and dynamic university.

Unless urgent and drastic action is taken, these cuts will have far wider impact - on Wellington and New Zealand.

Caitlin Cherry is editor of The Post.

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