

# **The History and Impacts of the University of Newcastle's Open Foundation Program**

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## Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo<sup>3</sup>.

(signed)

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the history and impacts of the largest and longest lasting enabling program in Australia, the Open Foundation Program (OFP). The thesis develops Bourdieu's idea that social reproduction is not static but allows spaces for people to acquire cultural capital and transform their habitus through the field of higher education. The thesis takes a multi-layered and mixed methods approach using oral history methodology to recount the memories of 38 staff of the University of Newcastle and analyses 350 student survey responses which include quantitative and qualitative data. The history chapters cover a forty-year period from the program's origin in 1974, providing insights and reflections on key events and personalities that shaped the direction OFP took and examines the contributions the program has made to the lives of students, the University of Newcastle and to the regions in which it is taught. Analysis of the student data indicate reasons for enrolling, most frequently to satisfy issues relating to self-identity and reflecting their capability. Stories of what became of Indigenous students, early school leavers, students with a (dis)ability – or, significant abilities, and Distance students, elaborate the transformations in the lives of people who might be considered the most educationally disadvantaged. The thesis also traces the career destinations of completing students and highlights the outcomes, not all economically advantageous, but mostly considered life changing for these students. The experience of studying OFP, most frequently expressed as embracing the joy of learning, resulted in one sixth of respondents continuing to postgraduate study. These findings suggest that, with well over 26,000 successful completions, OFP has transformed the lives of many people in the Hunter and Central Coast regions. The findings indicate the benefits of andragogy and that funding this area of education continues to be justified.

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