

Student Name:.....

(Qualitative) Research Methods for the Information Sciences (code 400290)

08 February 2007

FINAL EXAM

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA/FEW/I)

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This is a **closed book** exam. You are supposed to answer the questions on your own, i.e. without the use of a computer, books or any other material and without discussing the exam with anyone else. Cheating is not tolerated and will be handled according to strict University policies.

This exam has been designed to test your overall knowledge and understanding of the material covered in the course. It consists of a set of questions for a total of 100 points. The exam score is your total number of points divided by 10, and yields 2/3 of the final mark for this course; the remaining 1/3 comes from your score for the MSc review essay assignment.

Please make sure to use *the present form* for your answers, and use the space provided under each question. Answers will be evaluated based on content rather than length. In other words, there are no extra points for providing needlessly long answers. You are free to answer in English or Dutch.

This exam is not meant to be stressful and should not take you much more than one hour to complete if you have carefully studied the course materials. But: **Please make sure that your handwriting is legible and that you have printed your name at the top of each page.** Good luck!

Student Name:.....

Student ID Number:.....

Points:

- 1) _____ out of 15
- 2) _____ out of 20
- 3) _____ out of 15
- 4) _____ out of 15
- 5) _____ out of 15
- 6) _____ out of 20

Points total: _____ out of 100 (Exam score = points/10)

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Question 1 (15 points): In doing scientific research, triangulation is a key concept.

Question 1a (5 points):

Explain what "triangulation" means and what it tries to achieve in carrying out a scientific research study. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 1b (5 points): Mention two different types of triangulation and explain their purpose and nature.

1. (5 points – limit your answer to 3 lines):

2. (5 points – limit your answer to 3 lines):

Question 2 (20 points):

The "case study" is a prime example of a flexible research design in the Information Sciences.

Question 2a (5 points):

A first kind of case study is an "exploratory" case study. Explain what an exploratory case study is. Limit your answer to 3 lines.

Question 2b (5 points):

Give a concrete example of a research question or setting in which it would be useful to carry out an exploratory case study. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

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Question 2c (5 points).

Another kind of case study is called a “validating” case study. Explain what a validating case study is. Limit your answer to 3 lines.

Question 2d (5 points).

Give a concrete example of a research question or setting in which it would be useful to carry out a validating case study. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 3 (15 points):

The “validity” of results and claims is a central concept in scientific research; but there are many different types of validity.

Question 3a (5 points).

Explain what “internal validity” means. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 3b (5 points).

Explain what “external validity” means. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 3c (5 points).

Explain the difference between internal and external validity. Illustrate it by giving a concrete example that clearly demonstrates what the difference is. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

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Question 4 (15 points):

There are many different forms of reasoning, and they are variously used in different types of scientific method. This question is on two basic forms of scientific argumentation.

Question 4a (7 points):

Explain what “deduction” is. Give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 4b (8 points):

Explain what “abduction” is. Give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 5 (15 points):

In any research report or master thesis, there is an Introduction chapter that explains the research subject you investigate and how you approach it. Discuss (at least) four key components that are typically part of such a research Introduction chapter, and explain the underlying logic or story in communicating what you have done to the reader. Limit your answer to 12 lines. [*Hint: recall the master thesis review assignment you did, and the checklist of questions you had to answer.*]

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Question 6 (20 points):

The so-called “Zuidas” (southern strip) of Amsterdam stretches from Schiphol Airport to the business area near Duivendrecht; also the VU is located in this Zuidas area. As a result of continuing heavy investments, it is quickly becoming the major economic area of Amsterdam, where many international companies, banks, ICT and media companies etc. have their headquarters, and where there is a strong demand in business and industry for highly educated people. Now suppose that the Mayor of Amsterdam, as part of the Zuidas development, therefore wants to make social student life more attractive in this area neighbouring the VU.

It so happens that the Mayor of Amsterdam has selected *you* to research what the best ways are to achieve this. Describe below a research design for your study that satisfies the following requirements [limiting your answer to about this page, or about 20 lines]:

1. What is your decomposition of the overall subject area into more manageable research topics?
2. What are the research methods you will use? Note: it is required to employ *multiple* methods.
3. How will you triangulate your research results so that they are trustworthy for the Mayor as a basis for his future student life improvement policy?

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Feedback (optional):

- If you feel that a question was unclear, please indicate below the number of the question and provide a brief explanation.
- Was preparation for this exam a good way to get you to go over the class material again? Would you have reviewed the material otherwise?
- Do you feel that this exam was fair as a test of your knowledge about the course material? If not, what would you have done differently?
- How long did it take you to finish this exam?