Student Name:..............

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

30 January 2008

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 25
3)	_____	out of 35
4)	_____	out of 25

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

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Question 1 (15 points):
A key term in empirical research is "data", but real data come in many different guises.

Question 1a (5 points).
Explain what "primary data" are. Give an example. Limit your answer to 3 lines.

Question 1b (5 points).
Explain what "secondary data" are. Give an example. Limit your answer to 3 lines.

Question 1c (5 points).
Give an example of a research method that generates primary data, and also an example of a research method that typically employs secondary data. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 2 (25 points):
Certain empirical research methods are quite naturally related to certain styles of reasoning employed to come to conclusions. "Inductive" reasoning and the method known as "survey" provide an example.

Question 2a (5 points):
Explain what "induction" is. Limit your answer to 4 lines. If it helps you, do it (also) by example.

Question 2b (5 points).
Explain what a "survey" is. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 3b (10 points).
Discuss furthermore in relation to the patients' visit to the doctor: (i) how would you set up the observation process? (ii) the advantages and strong points, and (iii) the disadvantages and weak points of using the method of observation for this research study. Limit your answer to 9 lines.

Question 3c (15 points).
Give for this study a research design and discuss especially the aspect of validation (triangulation): how you can be confident that your results and conclusions are (or can be made more) trustworthy and accurate. Limit your answer to 12 lines.

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Question 2c (5 points):
Give a practical *example* of a research situation or problem where the survey would be a good method to use. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 2d (10 points):
Explain how inductive reasoning is *specifically* used in a survey in order to come to scientific conclusions based on the empirical data delivered by the survey. Limit your answer to 6 lines.

Question 3 (35 points):
Suppose that you want to carry out a detailed empirical study of the process that people visit their doctor (general practitioner, huisarts) and what happens in terms of events, relationships and interactions during such a visit to the doctor. In an empirical analysis of how such a work process "really goes", you might consider both the methods of *interviewing* relevant people and of *observation* on the work floor. But in such a study both methods will have advantages and disadvantages.

Question 3a (10 points).
Discuss in relation to the patients' visit to the doctor: (i) who would you interview? (ii) the advantages and strong points, and (iii) the disadvantages and weak points of using the interview method for this research study. Limit your answer to 9 lines.

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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?

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Question 4 (25 points):
Suppose that you have been asked by the Central Executive Board (CvB) of the VU University Amsterdam to research the following issue. Currently, students having psychological problems that for example harm their study progress may go to counselors in the VU (studentenpsychologen) to discuss things in person. Now, the CvB wants you to investigate the *feasibility* of doing part of this student counseling directly over the Internet, e.g. by developing a secure website as part of the VU intranet so that students can directly contact counselors and discuss problems confidentially *via* this web facility. Basically, the CvB asks you to study whether such an idea would make good sense and is possible to implement.

Clearly, this is a many-faceted research problem. Give a discussion of key issues to be considered in your research, and explain on the basis of that: what would be your decomposition of the overall problem into a list of research questions? Limit your answer to 25 lines (max. 1 page).