

Student Name:.....

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

30 January 2009

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 10
- 2) ___ out of 20
- 3) ___ out of 20
- 4) ___ out of 15
- 5) ___ out of 35

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

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Question 1 (10 points):

Science clearly has its roots in common-sense investigation and problem-solving concerning the world around us. However, over time, it has developed distinctive characteristics that make it different from common sense. Identify and briefly describe two major characteristics of scientific research that clarify how science differs from common sense problem-solving.

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

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

Question 2 (20 points):

The interview is one of the most common and practical research methods in the Information Sciences.

Question 2a: List three different types of “interview” and give their typical format and purpose.

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

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

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

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Question 2b (5 points):

Give a practical *example* of a research situation or problem where the interview would be a good method to use.

Question 3 (20 points):

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

Question 3a (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 3b (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.

Question 3c (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 3d (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.

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Question 4 (15 points):

In writing a final report about a research study, it is always recommended to include an abstract or executive summary. Why? What is (are) its purpose(s)? Limit your answer to 6 lines.

Question 5 (35 points):

Many universities in The Netherlands (and abroad) are struggling with the fact that the numbers of new students enrolling from high school (VWO) into bachelor studies in the areas of natural sciences and engineering (also known as studies in the "exact" sciences or "beta"-studies) is rather low.

One of the ideas around to increase the inflow of new bachelor students from high school into beta studies is to set up new bachelor studies that are more interdisciplinary and practical in nature, and so are deemed more attractive to 18-year olds. A specific example at the VU University Amsterdam is a new study called "Science, Business & Innovation", which is a mix of natural science subjects (mainly in physics and chemistry) with business and innovation subjects (how you bring new technology ideas to the market; business administration, entrepreneurship).

However, as a university you cannot just launch new studies as you wish. One of the formal requirements is that you carry out a "market investigation" so as to provide evidence (or at least demonstrate the likelihood) that the newly proposed study indeed has a significant potential to attract more students from the high-school population.

Now, suppose that you are asked by the Dean and Faculty Board of the Faculty of Exact Sciences (FEW) at the VU University Amsterdam to carry out such a market potential investigation for the mentioned study "Science, Business & Innovation". How would you go about it?

Question 5a (20 points):

Describe and explain a good research design for this investigation. Limit your answer to about 20 lines (under 1 page).

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Question 5b (15 points).

One of the tricky issues in such a market investigation is to establish confidence that the empirical data or results you get are "right" in the sense that the dean and the university can rely on them, in making a yes/no decision whether or not to actually start the new study. Therefore, describe and explain how you would validate your results within the context of the research design you have given above. (Hint: employ the concept of triangulation). Limit your answer to 15 lines (about 1/2 page).

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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?