

Student Name:.....

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

29 April 2009

FINAL EXAM

VU University 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):

The “research design” is one of the key scientific concepts in the early stages of conducting a research study. Give a (concise) definition of what a research design is.

Question 2 (20 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 2a (5 points):

Explain what “induction” is. Also, give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 2b (5 points):

Explain what “deduction” is. Also, give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 2c (10 points):

The method known as “survey” provides an example of the use of inductive reasoning. Explain clearly (i) what a survey is and (ii) in what *specific* way it uses induction to come to conclusions. Illustrate your explanation with an example. Limit your answer to 10 lines.

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Question 3 (15 points):

This question concerns the research method known as “focus group”.

Question 3a (5 points).

Explain what a “focus group” is. Limit your answer to 4 lines.

Question 3b (10 points).

Give a concrete, practical example of a research question in which the use of focus groups would be a good approach. Outline briefly how you would run the focus group in your chosen research setting. Limit your answer to 8 lines.

Question 4 (15 points):

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

Question 4a (5 points).

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

Question 4b (5 points).

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

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Question 4c (5 points).

Explain the difference between internal and external validity. Preferably show it by giving a concrete example that clearly demonstrates what the difference is. Limit your answer to 6 lines.

Question 5 (15 points):

These days, governments in many countries are increasingly restricting smoking in public spaces, including universities and other public buildings, but also restaurants, pubs and bars. A typical argument made in favour of such policies is that smoking is a danger to health (because it induces cancer), and it does so not only for the smoker him/herself, but also for bystanders that inhale the smoke produced by others. One typical counterargument commonly heard against such policies is of the following type: *“But I had a granddad that smoked two packs a day and he lived to the blessed age of 96.”* (And many more instances can be produced along the same lines).

Now, consider this as a possible scientific counter-argument that must be taken seriously, and analyze its quality and strength from a scientific point of view. Is it a scientifically acceptable argument? If yes, why? If not, then *what* precisely is wrong with it? Limit your answer to 10 lines.

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Question 6 (20 points):

Imagine the following situation. The VU Executive Board (College van Bestuur, CvB) wants to set up a user-friendly web portal for all researchers in all disciplines and faculties of the VU University Amsterdam. The aim for the individual researchers is that they have an easy way to disseminate their publications, promote them and make them more visible to the outside world (these days, increasingly via the Web). However, there are other stakeholders such as the university library staff, who have the task to archive all VU research publications (in a database) and make them accessible. Yet other stakeholders are departments, institutes and faculties, which must regularly report about scientific publications (as part of research performance and output), for example in annual reports or external research quality assessments.

So, the VU research portal has to serve the interests of different stakeholders within the VU. Suppose you are asked by the CvB to do a study on the user requirements for such a VU research portal. Come up with a research design describing how you would find out and validate what the needs and requirements of the different stakeholder groups are, and how you can bring them together in a single system. (Limit your answer to about 20 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?