

Student Name:.....

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

28 January 2010

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 16
- 2) _____ out of 14
- 3) _____ out of 15
- 4) _____ out of 15
- 5) _____ out of 15
- 6) _____ out of 25

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

Student Name:.....

Question 1 (16 points):

The method known as “survey” provides an example of the use of inductive reasoning. Explain:

- (a) what induction is;
- (b) what a survey is; and
- (c) in what *specific* way it uses induction to come to conclusions.
- (d) Illustrate your explanation with a concrete example.

Limit your answer to 12 lines.

Question 2 (14 points):

Question 2a (7 points).

Explain what “primary data” and “secondary data” are, and what their differences are. Limit your answer to 6 lines.

Question 2b (7 points).

What are the advantages and disadvantages of secondary data? Limit your answer to 6 lines.

Student Name:.....

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 (7 points):

Explain what “descriptive validity” means. Also give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Student Name:.....

Question 4b (8 points).

Explain what “interpretative validity” means. Also give a concrete example. Limit your answer to 5 lines.

Question 5 (15 points):

Science deals with claims that are (to be) supported by convincing arguments that withstand critical scrutiny. Consider the following (real-life!) argument:

Child to Parent: *Don't tell me that I should not steal candy from the corner store. Your argument is hypocritical, because you told me yourself just a week ago that you too stole candy when you were a kid.*

Analyze the quality of this argument:

- (a) Identify the premises and conclusion of this argument.
- (b) If there are questionable aspects of the argument, identify critical questions that should be asked.
- (c) Is this a scientifically acceptable argument? If yes, why? If not, then *what* precisely is wrong with it?

Limit your answer to about 12 lines in total.

Student Name:.....

Question 6 (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 about 25 lines (max. 1 page).

Student Name:.....

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?