Examiners' commentary 2018–2019

CO3320 Project – Zone B

General remarks

This commentary covers the examiners' observations on candidates' performance in the CO3320 Project examination (Zone B). In addition to reading this commentary, be sure to also read the commentaries for the CO3320 Preliminary Project Report (PPR) and for the Final Project Report (FPR).

The CO3320 examination is designed to verify that the candidate did indeed perform the work reported in their FPR, and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they did and the results they achieved.

The examination comprises four questions, all of which are compulsory. For anyone who has diligently pursued their Project from start to finish, the examination should be straightforward. Most candidates this year, as in previous years, obtained roughly equivalent marks for their FPR and for the examination.

Of the others, some obtained significantly higher marks for their examination than for their FPR – these were generally cases where the Project had encountered significant problems and perhaps was incomplete, and yet the candidate was able to provide a good discussion of the problems in their examination and provide sensible suggestions of what they might do differently if they were to do the Project again. In these cases, the candidate had demonstrated that they had learned from the experience, even if the Project result itself was not what was hoped for.

In a small number of cases, candidates received significantly **lower** marks for their examination than they did for their FPR. In these cases, the examination script generally showed several of the weaknesses described below for individual questions.

The following sections consider each of the four questions in turn, and discuss any common problems observed.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was about academic writing.

a. Part (a) should have been straightforward, but the quality of answers was quite mixed. The most common weakness was the lack of a clear statement of what a citation is. Good answers usually included an example from the candidate's own Project report of an item from their reference list (i.e. a reference), and of how that item was referred to within the main text (i.e. a citation, like '(Taylor, 2019)' or similar, depending on the citation style used).

b. Answers to (b) were mixed. The examiners were looking for understanding that the literature review sets the context of the Project, and shows the ways in which the work presented in the Project connects to work done by others. It also gives some background, and can suggest what might

be interesting research questions. Weaker answers to this question often failed to discuss how the literature review should help to guide the work to be undertaken in the rest of the Project.

c. Part (c) asked for specific things: the authors and title of the article or other work that most influenced the Project, a brief description of the content of the article, and a discussion of the impact it had on the Project. Many answers failed to address all aspects of the question. A few candidates listed several different articles rather than selecting a single one – these answers did not usually score highly because they tended to give less detailed discussion about each paper.

Question 2

This question was about the Project topic and aims.

a. Part (a) was straightforward and was answered well by nearly all candidates.

b. Answers to (b), on the other hand, were more mixed. The question asked for the main research question driving the Project. Many responses were not stated in terms of a research question to be answered. The subject guide advises that it is helpful to frame your Project in terms of a question to be answered. If the Project was not framed in this way, then this should be mentioned and discussed in response to an examination question such as this.

c. Part (c) should have been straightforward. As stated in the subject guide, objectives are specific quantifiable achievements that represent progress towards the overall aim(s) of the Project. Common weaknesses in responses to this part included a failure to give a clear explanation of what objectives are, and how they related to aims. Another common weakness was to list objectives that did not match those listed in the Project report.

d. Part (d) was answered well by most candidates. A few candidates said nothing about possible disadvantages of having a supervisor. For those who felt there were no disadvantages, they should have stated this in their answer.

Question 3

This question was about data analysis and Project conclusions.

a. Part (a) was answered fairly well by most candidates. The examiners were looking for an understanding that quantitative data is data that can be measured numerically and precisely rather than through interpretation, whereas qualitative data requires a subjective decision in order to be categorized or measured. The most common weakness was simply a failure to clearly describe the difference between the two.

b. Very few candidates answered (b) well. It is another question where several things are being asked (both for those who collected data in their Project and for those who did not), and the examiners were expecting to see all of these things discussed in the answer. The most common weakness in the responses to this question was simply that the candidate did not address all aspects of the question. Another weakness was seen in some Projects that involved an aspect of machine learning. In a few cases the candidate discussed their training data in response to this question; however, the overall wording of the question should make it clear that it is relating to data generated as the **output** of experiments, and how this data was analysed to reach conclusions in the Project, rather than to **input** data used to train the system.

c. Answers to (c) were mixed. The most common failing was to not fully answer the second part of the question regarding advice to be given, or to only offer very superficial or general advice. In this question the examiners were looking to see what lessons you had learned from the process of

doing your Project, and how you could use your experience to formulate advice to a future student.

Question 4

This question was about self-reflection.

a. Part (a) was answered reasonably well by most candidates. The examiners were looking for an insightful answer that rung true with respect to the Project and showed the candidate's ability to reflect on their experience. Weaker answers tended to dwell too much on technical aspects of the Project rather than general skills, or offered a variety of different lessons rather than identifying what the candidate believed to be the most important one. The problem with giving multiple lessons when only one is asked for is that these answers tended to go into less detail about any one lesson learned.

b. Part (b) was also answered well by most candidates. Many candidates clearly showed in their answers some thoughtful self-reflection on what they had achieved. A few candidates only discussed failings in their current Project without providing suggestions of how they would do things differently in a new Project. In general, however, there were some very good answers to this part, that demonstrated that the candidate had reflected upon what they had done and had learned important lessons from the experience.

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job with the examination, and their marks broadly reflected the marks they achieved for their FPR. The main areas where some candidates fell down were in not responding to all parts of the questions, and in not providing detailed answers relating specifically to their own Project. Both of these shortcomings can be easily avoided.