Economics Assignment #1: Grandparents’ Day Interview

Introduction: Sunday, September 12, 2010 was Grandparents’ Day. This holiday should remind all of us of the valuable roles that grandparents and other elders can play in our educations. Our elders’ memories and life experiences are a rich source of first-hand information about many topics, including economics. This assignment asks you to conduct primary research in economic history by interviewing a senior adult about his or her participation in the U.S. and world economies and the economic changes s/he has observed during the past two generations.

The Assignment. By the beginning of class on ____________, ______________, you will:

(a) Conduct in-person or telephone interview with a grandparent or other adult over the age of 65. Take careful notes during your interview. If your grandparents are not living or are not accessible to you, consider speaking with a family friend, a neighbor, the grandparent of an I.H.S. friend, or a member of a community group to which you belong. For the purposes of this assignment, your interview should relate primarily to your elder’s involvement with, and observations about, the U.S. economy and its changes over time. Consider asking:

1. What is your work history? How did you choose the job(s) you have had? How were those choices affected by your training and education? To what extent were those choices within or outside of your control (and why)? If you did not work outside the home, why not? What was the most (or least) rewarding job you ever had? Why?

2. Did your family or community ever face particularly hard economic times? Can you describe specific examples of how your family (or families you knew) dealt with those hardships? How were those hardships addressed by local, state or national government(s)? By charitable or community organizations?

3. What are the most significant changes (for good or bad) you have observed in the U.S. economy during your lifetime? [If the interviewee was raised in another country:] What comparisons can you draw between the U.S. economy and other nations’ economies with which you are familiar? What opportunities are now available (and to whom) that were not available to you during your childhood? Conversely, what opportunities have disappeared or grown more difficult? Do you think I [the interviewer] will have more or fewer economic opportunities than you did? Why?

4. How has your life been affected by the “globalization” of the world’s economies? In what ways do you feel part of, or disconnected from, the global economy? Overall, do you think globalization has had positive or negative effects on the U.S. economy? Why?

5. What advice do you have for contemporary high school economics students? What economic issues do you wish you understood better? What local, national and international economic issues do you think are most important for high school students to study, and why?

6. [Other questions you create]:


(b) Write a 2-3 page narrative summary of your interview. Your summary should:

1. Describe your interviewee’s relationship to you, why you chose him or her as your subject, and the circumstances under which your interview was conducted. E.g., “On Saturday, September 15th, I interviewed my long-time neighbor, Mrs. Ramirez at her home. Mrs. Ramirez has often talked with our family about her immigration to the United States in the 1960s. I thought she would have an interesting perspective on the United States’ economy because .... ”

2. Be written as a **topically organized, narrative account** of your interview, not as a series of questions and answers. The summary should combine synthesized information with direct quotation. E.g., "My grandfather left high school in 1943 to work on his uncle’s hog farm in Iowa. He spent most of the 1940s and early ’50s preparing to take over that family farm, but was forced to leave Iowa when ‘the bottom fell out of the hog market and [he] lost everything.’”

3. Identify specific economic experiences and observations your interviewee has had and specific advice s/he offered to you about the study of economics. E.g., “My grandmother studied biology at Grinnell College from 1950-54, at a time when most young women in rural Iowa did not finish high school. This led her to a career teaching physiology and anatomy at a junior college in Davenport, Iowa. Despite my grandmother’s expertise in the sciences, she confessed she wished she had learned more about managing personal finances. She urged me to learn more about managing my own money, and to think about how my spending choices affect businesses in my community ....”

4. Describe and reflect upon your reactions to your interviewee’s economics-related experiences and advice. How might his or her experiences affect your study of economics this year? What surprised you about your interviewee’s answers? Did you agree or disagree strongly with any observations or advice your interviewee offered?

5. **Formal requirements:** Your interview summary should be:
   - Creatively titled
   - Typed or word-processed
   - Double-spaced, 12-point font, black ink, 1” margins on all sides, Times New Roman or Courier font
   - Stapled to the front of the notes you took during your interview
   - Written with strict adherence to standard conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.

**Scoring Rubric**

1. Careful description of interviewee and circumstances of interview: _______/10

2. Content: thoughtful, detailed description of interview topics and interviewee’s responses (10 pts.); thoughtful, articulate description of your reactions to interviewee’s answers (10 pts.) _______/10

3. Organization: narrative is well-organized and easy to follow _______/5

4. Originality: interview questions, summary of responses and personal reflection reflect significant original thought _______/10

5. Form: summary is neatly presented in accordance with all direction and follows standard conventions of spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. _______5