

CHAPTER 3

Commemorating Dr. James Gwartney: A Dedicated Scholar, Freedom Fighter, and Genuinely Kind Individual

Signè DeWind

Most people know the revered Dr. James Gwartney as one of the world's leading economists whose work advanced economic freedom, public choice economics, and economic literacy. I had the privilege of serving as his right-hand person during the last decade of his academic career at Florida State University (FSU). I can attest that his kind character, genuinely caring and calm demeanor, Christian faith, and joyful spirit had just as profound an impact on me as his impressive scholarship, remarkable memory, and exceptional ability to communicate ideas. Two-and-a-half years after his passing, Jim Gwartney remains well worth commemorating—not only for his extraordinary scholarly contributions, but also for the life he lived and the countless people he influenced.



Jim Gwartney in 2017, speaking and presenting his research at an event in Kyiv, Ukraine, hosted by the Bendukidze Free Market Center. (Photo courtesy of Ekonomichna Pravda.)

A brief history of the development of the *Economic Freedom of the World* index

Among James Gwartney's most enduring contributions to economics was his leadership in developing the *Economic Freedom of the World* (EFW) index, published annually by the Fraser Institute since 1996. Today, the index is one of the world's leading measures of economic freedom and has become an indispensable resource for scholars studying the relationship between economic institutions and various measures pertaining to human well-being.

On many occasions, Dr. Gwartney would tell our class of students that he remembered receiving a letter inviting him to participate in the development of a measure of economic freedom. At first glance, he thought to himself, "What a harebrained idea! How could one possibly go about measuring something so multifaceted and complex?" Then he noticed the signature at the bottom of the letter—it was from Milton Friedman. His skepticism quickly gave way to enthusiasm, and he immediately replied that he would be delighted to participate.

The origins of the EFW index trace back to discussions at the 1984 Mont Pelerin Society General Meeting in Cambridge, England. The participants had been discussing the relationship between economic freedom and political freedom, and debating whether economic freedom across the world had increased or decreased in recent years. They were unable to come to a consensus—illustrating the need for an empirical measure. Over lunch following one of the sessions, Fraser Institute founding executive Michael Walker convinced Milton and Rose Friedman to join him in hosting an inaugural symposium devoted to defining and measuring economic freedom. Following that symposium, Walter Block and Alvin Rabushka proposed a continuing series of conferences devoted specifically to developing a rigorous measure of economic freedom.

This was the beginning of the six Rating Economic Freedom (REF) conferences convened by the Fraser Institute, and sponsored by Liberty Fund and co-hosted by Michael Walker, Milton Friedman, and Rose Friedman. The conferences brought together many of the world's leading economists, including Milton Friedman, Douglass North, Gary Becker (all three Nobel Laureates), as well as William Niskanen, Gordon Tullock, Peter Bauer, Assar Lindbeck, and James Gwartney, to develop a rigorous and clearly defined measure of economic freedom.

These six REF conferences,¹ held between 1986 and 1993, culminated in two important outcomes: the publication of *Economic Freedom of the World: 1975–1995* by James Gwartney, Robert Lawson, and Walter Block in 1996, and the formation of the Economic

1 REF I: October 5–8, 1986 (Napa Valley, California); REF II: July 28–30, 1988 (Vancouver, British Columbia); REF III: October 5–8, 1989 (Banff, Alberta); REF IV: November 8–11, 1990 (Sea Ranch, California); REF V: 1991 (Monterey, California); REF VI: 1993 (Sonoma, California).



The first annual Economic Freedom of the World conference: October 30-31, 1996 in San Francisco, California; James Gwartney is in the middle row and is the third individual from the left side of the photo; his EFW co-author Bob Lawson is next to him, and is the second individual from the left side of the photo; Milton and Rose Friedman are in the center of the photo, sitting in the first row of chairs; Michael Walker is sitting on the floor in front of the Friedmans. (Photo courtesy of Annabel Addington.)

Freedom Network—a collaboration of nearly 120 independent institutions from more than 80 countries dedicated to improving the measurement of economic freedom worldwide and communicating the research to local stakeholders in their respective countries.

The early development of the EFW index has been documented in several books and articles.² One pivotal development occurred during the third REF conference in 1989, when James Gwartney and Walter Block concluded that it would be more productive to focus on a smaller set of variables that could be obtained for a large number of countries. Milton Friedman agreed and encouraged Gwartney to pursue that approach. After returning to Tallahassee, Gwartney enlisted the help of his graduate student, Bob Lawson, and together they began constructing what would become the EFW index. The approach proved tractable, and as new data have become available, the authors have been able to expand the index so that it now encompasses both a large number of countries *and* a large set of indicators (46 in the latest edition).

2 The origins of the EFW project can be traced to Michael Walker's commentary on historian Paul Johnson's paper, *1984: A False Alarm*, at the 1984 Mont Pelerin Society General Meeting in Cambridge, England. For detailed accounts of the early development of the EFW index, see (a) the proceedings from the first symposium in 1986 (particularly the preface; Walker, 1988: ix-xvi); (b) the proceedings from the second symposium in 1988 (Block, 1991); (c) papers presented at the third and fourth symposia in 1989 and 1990 (Easton and Walker, 1992); (d) Gwartney, Lawson, and Block (1996: Forward, Introduction, and Chapter 1); (e) Gwartney and Lawson (2003: 405–430); (f) Gwartney and Lawson (2004: 217–238); for the entire conference proceedings, see Wynne, Rosenblum, and Formaini (2004); and for the individual chapter, see Gwartney and Lawson (2004); and (g) Gwartney and Lawson (2024: 16–30).

The Economic Freedom Network continued to convene conferences, and beginning in 1997, the *Economic Freedom of the World* report became an annual publication with EFW data updated every year. Since its inception, James Gwartney has served as the report's lead author, working alongside Robert Lawson and, in later years, Joshua Hall and Ryan Murphy.³

The EFW index has become one of the most widely used measures of economic freedom in empirical research. Fraser Institute records indicate that the index has been cited in more than 6,700 scholarly publications from 1994 through 2025,⁴ although this almost certainly understates its total scholarly impact.⁵ According to Google Scholar, researchers have cited various versions of the EFW index approximately 16,000 times.

The EFW index filled a major gap in the scholarly literature by providing researchers with a rigorous measure of economic freedom. It has also become an important educational tool for understanding the role that economic freedom plays in economic development and human flourishing.⁶

James Gwartney himself authored numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters using the EFW index, although his prolific research and writing extended far beyond the study of economic freedom.⁷ Among his many publications and co-publications using the EFW index are:

- *Economic Freedom and the Environment for Economic Growth* (Gwartney, Lawson and Holcombe, 1999);
- *The Concept and Measurement of Economic Freedom* (Gwartney, and Lawson, 2003);
- *Economic Freedom, Institutional Quality, and Cross-Country Differences in Income and Growth* (Gwartney, Holcombe, and Lawson, 2004);
- *Institutions and the Impact of Investment on Growth* (Gwartney, Holcombe, and Lawson, 2006);
- *Institutions, Economic Freedom, and Cross-Country Differences in Performance* (2009 Presidential Address to the Southern Economic Association; Gwartney, 2009);
- “Economic Freedom and Global Poverty” (Gwartney and Connors, 2010)
- *Does Democratization Facilitate Economic Liberalization?* (Rode and Gwartney, 2012);

3 Robert Lawson has co-authored every EFW report since its inception in 1996. Joshua Hall joined as a co-author beginning with the 2010 annual report. Ryan Murphy began assisting with the project in 2016 and became a co-author beginning with the 2018 annual report. As of the 2026 annual report, the EFW index is constructed from 46 distinct variables drawn from third-party data sources, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, World Economic Forum, and World Trade Organization.

4 See Fraser Institute (n.d.).

5 For example, a Google Scholar search conducted on June 14, 2026, found 2,930 citations to the *Economic Freedom of the World: 2008 Annual Report* alone and 2,123 citations to the *Economic Freedom of the World: 2021 Annual Report* alone.

6 See Hall and Lawson (2014) and Lawson (2022).

7 See Gwartney (2021).

- *Economic Institutions and Comparative Economic Development: A Post-Colonial Perspective* (Bennett, Faria, Gwartney, and Morales, 2017); and
- *The Transportation-Communication Revolution: 50 Years of Dramatic Change in Economic Development* (Connors, Gwartney, and Montesinos, 2020).

Gwartney's curriculum vitae lists 49 journal articles and 37 monographs and book chapters, in addition to numerous textbooks, testimonies, web articles, videos, and other scholarly works.⁸

One of economic education's most influential scholars

James Gwartney also profoundly influenced the field of economic education. It is rare for a scholar of his stature to possess not only an exceptional ability to conduct influential research, but also a gift for explaining economics in simple terms—and a passion for doing so. While his work developing the EFW index exemplifies his commitment to advancing economic freedom, his textbooks and other educational initiatives reflect an equally deep commitment to expanding economic literacy.

His textbook *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, first published in 1976, helped fill a void in principles textbooks by integrating public choice economics into introductory economics education. In addition to explaining how markets allocate resources, it teaches students to apply economic reasoning to the political process and government decision-making. Gwartney was the sole author of the first edition. He added Richard Stroup as a co-author beginning with the second edition, and in subsequent editions Russell Sobel and David Macpherson joined him as coauthors. The textbook is currently in its 18th edition, has been translated into multiple languages, and is used by professors at more than 160 colleges and universities in the United States alone. With five decades of continuous use and 18 editions, it stands among a very small group of economics textbooks with such longevity and influence.

Gwartney's commitment to incorporating public choice into principles-level economics instruction continued throughout his career. In a 2015 study with Rosemarie Fike, he examined the extent to which contemporary principles textbooks addressed public choice, market failure, and government failure.⁹

Gwartney was also the lead author of *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Wealth and Prosperity*, first published in 2005 with Richard Stroup and Dwight R. Lee. As of 2024, it is in its fourth edition, which includes Dwight R. Lee and additional

8 See Gwartney (2021).

9 Rosemarie Fike and James D. Gwartney (2015).

coauthors Tawni Hunt Ferrarini, Joseph P. Calhoun, and Jane Shaw Stroup. Gwartney also spearheaded the Common Sense Economics project, which expanded beyond the book into curriculum materials and teacher workshops. *Common Sense Economics* and its accompanying curriculum have been adopted in both high school and introductory college courses, and with the book translated into at least 33 languages, it is also widely used around the world.

The Common Sense Economics project was one of many initiatives Gwartney led while serving as Director of Florida State University's Gus A. Stavros Center for the Advancement of Free Enterprise and Economic Education from 2003 to 2016. For example, the Stavros Center organized annual Creative Teaching Ideas workshops where high school teachers and college instructors learned innovative teaching tools and classroom activities from guest speakers. The center also hosted AP Macroeconomics review sessions for high school students in Tallahassee.

While the many editions of *Economics: Private and Public Choice* and *Common Sense Economics* are the textbooks for which Gwartney is best known, he also authored or edited numerous other books on economics and public choice, including *1929 Revisited: An Economic Handbook for the Turbulent Seventies*; *Essentials of Economics*; *Public Choice and Constitutional Economics*; *What Everyone Should Know About Economics and Prosperity*;¹⁰ and *Introduction to Economics: The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*.

Gwartney had an immense impact on economic education in a “macro” sense through his textbooks, curriculum, and other educational initiatives, yet few individuals (other than his students) witnessed the equally profound impact he had at the “micro” level through his classroom teaching. The Fall 2018 semester marked his 100th semester of teaching at Florida State University, and when he retired at the end of Spring 2022, he had taught at FSU for 54 years. Upon retiring from Florida State University in 2022, Gwartney was named Professor Emeritus—one of academia's highest honors recognizing a career of distinguished service.

In 2014, as I was finishing my graduate program, Jim told me he would create a position for me if I stayed in Tallahassee. I subsequently began working with him at the FSU Stavros Center as the Common Sense Economics (CSE) Project Director, later serving in other positions at the university. During my first few years at the center, my work focused on CSE-related projects, including working with Jim to revise *Common Sense Economics* for its third edition and teaching an online CSE course for educators. Beginning in Fall 2015, I assisted with his Honors Principles of Microeconomics and Honors Principles of Macroeconomics

10 *What Everyone Should Know About Economics and Prosperity* (1993), coauthored with Richard Stroup, was published by The James Madison Institute and several cooperating organizations, including The Heartland Institute. It later served as the predecessor to *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Wealth and Prosperity*. Michael Walker also adapted the book for Canadian readers, and the Canadian edition was published by the Fraser Institute in 1993.

courses, which led to co-teaching both courses through Fall 2020. I also worked with Jim on a number of other publications and projects, including revisions for the 16th and 17th editions of *Economics: Private and Public Choice*. Over the years my roles at the university expanded into other areas such as teaching courses and research—opportunities that would not have arisen had Jim not encouraged me to first work with him. Likewise, I can trace many of my own economics connections and collaborations with institutes and coauthored publications back to Jim’s encouragement and funding for my participation in conferences such as the Association of Private Enterprise Education (APEE), Freedom Fest, and the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS). Jim’s support of those experiences greatly expanded my professional network, collaborations, and career opportunities.

Over the years, I heard from many FSU students who said his class was their favorite course or that he was their favorite professor. They especially appreciated that he welcomed all points of view and was always willing to have a hearty discussion of controversial topics. It was not uncommon for students to remain after class to continue discussions with Professor Gwartney. Many told me they decided to major in economics because of our Principles courses, while others said he changed the way they viewed the world—or even changed their lives. These testimonies reflect only the experiences of undergraduates. Anyone who speaks with his Ph.D. dissertation students gains an even greater appreciation for the enormous, albeit unquantifiable, impact Jim had on his mentees.¹¹

That mentorship often extended beyond the classroom. Jim and his wife Amy’s home became affectionately known among friends as “The Gwartney Inn,” or sometimes “The Gwartney Bed and Breakfast,” reflecting the hospitality they extended to students, colleagues, and visitors who came to Tallahassee to work with Jim. Their generosity was also evident in another long-standing tradition. Each Thanksgiving, they also opened their home to anyone who did not have a place to spend the holiday. Before dinner, Jim would share what he called the economics lesson of Thanksgiving, using Benjamin Powell’s article, “The Pilgrims’ Real Thanksgiving Lesson,” to illustrate one of the most fundamental economic principles: incentives matter.¹²

11 I have compiled a list of his doctoral dissertation students (for whom Dr. James Gwartney served as chair, co-chair, or committee member), as well as several Honors in the Major theses he supervised, though the record may still be incomplete, particularly for earlier years. If Dr. Gwartney served as chair, co-chair, or a member of your dissertation or thesis committee—or that of someone you know—I would welcome additional information as I continue documenting this important aspect of his legacy in economic education. I also welcome testimonials (regardless of how you knew Jim Gwartney). You can email me, Signè DeWind, at signe.econ@gmail.com.

12 The lesson centered on the Pilgrims’ transition from communal property rights to privately assigned plots of land in 1623. Before the Gwartney Gobblefest meal at Thanksgiving, Jim would explain that the resulting change in incentives led to greater productivity and ultimately to the bountiful harvest remembered as the first Thanksgiving. See Powell (2004).

Jim's love and passion for economics extended far beyond spreading economic literacy. He took countless individuals under his wing, fostering a small army of economically literate students and scholars, many of whom developed a passion for economic freedom and public choice economics. Although the full impact of his contributions to economic education can never be measured, the evidence is overwhelming that his legacy is both far-reaching and deeply personal.

Chief economist of the Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress, and Gwartney's visit to Russia to advise Vladimir Putin

In 1998, James Gwartney, Robert Lawson, and Randall Holcombe prepared a report for the US Congress's Joint Economic Committee titled *The Size and Functions of Government and Economic Growth*.¹³ Shortly thereafter, Jim and his wife, Amy, temporarily relocated from Tallahassee to Washington, DC, where he served as Chief Economist of the Joint Economic Committee from 1999 to 2000. During his tenure, Andrei Illarionov, the incoming Putin administration's chief economic adviser, invited Jim to participate in discussions regarding the future direction of the Russian economy.¹⁴ In March 2000, Jim joined a few other economists in Russia for a week of meetings focused on market-oriented reforms and economic growth. The invitation reflected Jim's international reputation as a leading scholar on the relationship between economic institutions and prosperity.

Jim's visit included a meeting with Vladimir Putin, who at the time was pursuing reforms to move Russia further away from its Soviet-era command economy and toward a more market-oriented economy. One of the recommendations Jim discussed was reducing Russia's personal income tax burden.¹⁵ At the time, Russia's top personal income tax rate was 35 percent, while its payroll tax was nearly 40 percent, creating strong incentives for tax avoidance and evasion. Jim recalled having an extensive discussion with Putin on the tax issue and credited Illarionov with spearheading reforms that soon resulted in Russia adopting a flat 13 percent personal income tax.¹⁶ The reform attracted international attention as revenues

13 Gwartney, Lawson, and Holcombe (1998).

14 From 1994 to 2000, Andrei Illarionov served as director of the Institute for Economic Analysis, which he founded in Moscow. By 2000, Jim had known Illarionov for several years through work related to the *Economic Freedom of the World* project.

15 Lower marginal income tax rates can increase incentives to work, invest, and report taxable income while reducing incentives for tax avoidance and evasion.

16 In July 2000, the Russian government enacted a flat 13 percent personal income tax, effective January 1, 2001. Beginning in 2001, Russia replaced its previous personal income tax rates of 12 percent, 20 percent, and 30 percent with a single flat rate of 13 percent. Alvin Rabushka (who, along with Robert Hall, first proposed the idea of a flat tax in the United States in 1981) later wrote: "From a revenue standpoint, the 13% flat tax has exceeded all expectations. Preliminary data for 2001 reveal that the flat tax generated R254.7 billion, an increase of R80.2 billion over 2000, up 46%" (Rabushka, 2002).

increased substantially despite the lower tax rate, suggesting that improved compliance and stronger incentives to earn and report income offset much of the reduction in statutory tax rates. The payroll tax was also reformed.¹⁷ Although Russia later moved away from the flat-tax structure, the reform remained in place for two decades, encouraged other post-communist states to adopt similar flat-tax structures, and stands as one of the most significant policy changes associated with the country's post-Soviet transition.¹⁸

The remarkable productivity of a blind scholar

Jim Gwartney was so productive and prolific that someone who had never met him in person might not realize that he was completely blind during the later years of his life—including the entire time I knew him. His struggle with glaucoma began around 1982. While eyedrops, lasers, and surgeries slowed the disease's progression, nothing was able to stop it. While serving as a visiting professor at Central European University in Prague, he developed an eye infection in 1994 that resulted in the loss of his right eye. By 2006 Jim was completely blind, although his vision had been severely impaired for many years before that.

Throughout the years of his blindness, Jim's wife, Amy, faithfully accompanied him to conferences and other events, helping him remain remarkably active throughout the final decades of his career. Readers interested in learning more about Jim and Amy's life together—including the story of how they met, family photographs of them and their four sons, Jim's obituary, and a video of his funeral service—will find additional resources in the footnotes.¹⁹

One fascinating conversation I had with Jim changed the way I think about blindness. After working with him for several years, I asked whether what he sees is the color black. Jim explained that he does not see black but instead sees “nothing.” He pointed out that sighted people cannot comprehend the idea of seeing nothing and often assume blindness is like closing one's eyes and seeing darkness or black. But even then we are still seeing something—the inside of our eyelids. For Jim, there was not even darkness; there was simply nothing at all.

17 Prior to the 2001 reforms, Russia's combined payroll tax totaled 39.5 percent (38.5 percent paid by employers and one percent paid by employees). Beginning in 2001, payroll tax rates declined with additional income, ranging from 35.6 percent to five percent, and the lowest rate was further reduced to two percent beginning in 2002. See Martinez-Vazquez, Rider, Qibthiyyah, and Wallace (2006).

18 Russia's 13 percent flat personal income tax remained in effect from 2001 through 2021. Beginning in 2021, Russia increased the rate to 15 percent for top income earners, and in 2024 adopted a more progressive income tax schedule with a top marginal rate of 22 percent (see Reuters, 2024).

19 See (a) DeWind (n.d.) for a digital archive curated by Signè DeWind as an ongoing effort to preserve and share materials related to the life, scholarship, and legacy of James D. Gwartney (contributions such as photographs, documents, tributes, and other historical materials are welcome); (b) List and Schuler (2023: 31–33), for background describing how Jim and Amy met; (c) J.R. Gwartney's slideshow created for Jim and Amy's 50th wedding anniversary (see Gwartney, 2013); (d) James D. Gwartney obituary, including additional family photographs (see Dignity Memorial, 2024); (e) a video of Jim Gwartney's funeral service (see Gwartney Institute, 2024b).

One of the things I miss most is our daily walks. Jim could navigate the inside of the FSU Stavros Center and his home independently, but when walking to most other places, he needed assistance and would walk arm-in-arm with whoever was helping him. Over the course of a decade, we likely took more than 1,000 walks together—across Florida State University’s campus, at conferences such as APEE and FreedomFest, at church, down the aisle on my wedding day, and elsewhere.

Each day Jim was on campus, we’d walk from the Stavros Center to one of our usual lunch spots. If it was just the two of us, we’d often go to the Sweet Shop. If we were meeting colleagues from FSU’s economics department, we’d walk to the Subway restaurant near campus. During those walks he was always laughing and cracking jokes. That is what made Jim so unique: he was phenomenally brilliant, but also genuinely caring with a joyfully exuberant personality.

Our walks perfectly captured Jim’s jovial spirit, so I’m including one of my favorite photos from over the years. The selfie included in this section is a candid photo I captured while he was laughing and joking around. He often referred to us as “the blonde leading the blind,” but the ironic part is that he was the one leading me—with his cheerful spirit, brilliant mind, and unwavering faith.

Jim often had a better sense of direction than his sighted friends. On more than one occasion, I accidentally headed in the wrong direction while driving us somewhere in Tallahassee, only for Jim to point out that we were headed the wrong way. Other colleagues shared similar stories. Another memorable example occurred at FreedomFest, when another colleague and I walked a short distance down the hotel hallway before Jim asked, “Isn’t the elevator the other direction?” We joked that we were simply testing him.

Another example was shared with me by Tom McCaleb, a retired FSU economics professor who was also part of our weekly Subway lunch group:



Jim Gwartney and Signè DeWind (then Thomas) on one of their daily walks across Florida State University’s campus; January 22, 2020.

Jim and I shared a love for Kansas University basketball. During the season, we would talk about it at lunch, much I'm sure to the dismay of our lunch companions, and we would sometimes email during a game. What was amazing was the following conversation that occurred more than once.

Jim: Tom, did you see [some particular play in the previous game]?

Tom: No, Jim, I guess I missed that.

Whereupon sight-impaired Jim would proceed to tell sighted Tom about this play that sighted Tom missed even though he was watching the game.

Not only was Jim incredibly productive despite being blind, but he faced blindness with extraordinary grace. Out of all the time I spent working with him, the only time I can recall Jim appearing frustrated by his blindness was when his JAWS screen-reading software would occasionally update without notice and a keyboard function would change that he was not yet accustomed to—but even then, he adapted quickly. Never once did I see him become sad or angry about being blind. Nor did I ever see him yell or lose his temper, whether with those he worked alongside or in response to situations that would have been deeply frustrating for many people to navigate without sight. Jim's demeanor was always resolutely calm.

In fact, Jim adjusted so well to being blind that on multiple occasions I found myself explaining to students and others that he was, in fact, completely blind. People often assumed he retained at least some vision because of how capably he performed various tasks. I remember one FSU student insisting that Jim must be able to see a little because the student walked into his office and saw him typing at his computer. I explained that Jim types without sight and that his JAWS software reads text aloud, enabling him to read documents, navigate email, attach files, compose messages, and perform many other tasks independently.

What is especially remarkable is how efficient he became. While working together in his office, there were occasions when I was searching for a document on my laptop, and Jim located and opened the same file on his computer before I could find it on mine. Unlike a sighted user, he could not visually scan folders or filenames. Instead, he relied on memory—remembering which folder and subfolders contained each document—while using JAWS to navigate one filename at a time until he reached the file he wanted. Yet despite those limitations, he was often astonishingly quick. A sighted person should have been able to locate a Word document faster every single time, but embarrassingly, I cannot say that was always the case. Jim was remarkably efficient and capable on the computer. Although he could not use a mouse, he mastered keyboard commands and screen-reading technology to accomplish tasks that many people would assume impossible without sight.

Another example of how remarkably Jim continued his scholarly work despite blindness was his ability to deliver presentations entirely from memory. During lectures and

conference presentations, he routinely cited specific statistics and figures displayed throughout his PowerPoint slides.

During the final decade of his life, I was almost always the one helping Jim prepare his PowerPoint slides for classes and conferences. Before each presentation, I would read the slides aloud to him. That meant that if he was presenting at a conference in another city, the last time he had heard many of those statistics was often several days earlier, when we reviewed the presentation together in his office in Tallahassee.

Unlike most presenters, Jim could not glance at note cards immediately before or during a presentation. Yet his memory was so extraordinary that he consistently recalled highly specific statistics and other details without notes and without being able to see the projected slides. Occasionally, students or audience members assumed he could see the slides, and I would explain, “No, the slides are just for you—the audience—to be able to see the graphs and tables so you’ll better understand what he’s describing. He can’t actually see anything on the screen. He’s 100% blind.” The response was often one of genuine amazement as people realized the sheer volume of information Jim had just presented entirely from memory.

Although Jim lost 100 percent of his physical eyesight, he never lost his vision for what mattered most. His Christian faith shaped both his worldview and his character, and his commitment to economic freedom, economic education, and human flourishing remained as strong and clear as ever. Blindness diminished neither his intellectual curiosity nor his ability to inspire others, and his remarkable productivity and prolific scholarship continued throughout the remainder of his life.

The Gwartney Institute for Freedom, Justice, and Human Flourishing

In honor of Dr. James Gwartney, economist Russ McCullough founded the Gwartney Institute for Freedom, Justice, and Human Flourishing at Jim’s alma mater, Ottawa University. The institute officially opened in August 2018 with a mission to study economic freedom, social justice, and their role in advancing human flourishing.²⁰

The Gwartney Institute also produces the *Faith and Economics* podcast,²¹ where Russ McCullough, Peter Jacobsen, and Justin Clarke discuss issues related to economic freedom and human flourishing from a Christian perspective. Following Jim’s passing in January 2024, the hosts dedicated episode #273 to celebrating his life and legacy.²² Earlier, in episode #211, “Inflation Incentives Matter—Dr. Jim Gwartney,” Jim joined the podcast to discuss inflation, economic incentives, and the fiscal outlook for the United States.²³

20 See Ottawa University (2026).

21 See Gwartney Institute (2026).

22 See Gwartney Institute (2024a).

23 See Gwartney Institute (2022).

The institute also honors Jim through a named professorship. Peter Jacobsen serves as the Gwartney Professor of Economic Education and Research. Likewise, Russ McCullough holds the Wayne D. Angell Distinguished Chair of Economics, named in honor of Dr. Wayne D. Angell, who was Jim Gwartney's first economics professor at Ottawa University.²⁴

Key intellectual influences

One of the professors who most influenced Jim Gwartney's economic views was Wayne Angell. Jim later remarked that Angell essentially *was* the economics department at Ottawa University at the time, estimating that he took roughly 10 courses from him. Although Angell used Paul Samuelson's *Economics* textbook, his lectures often departed from the text, explaining the unintended consequences of government intervention and why politically popular policies frequently persisted even when they made people worse off. Before the term "public choice economics" was coined or became a recognized field, Angell was teaching many of the ideas that Jim would later identify with government failure and public choice analysis.²⁵

After graduating from Ottawa University, Jim entered the graduate program in economics at Washington State University. He quickly realized the department was strongly Keynesian and generally unwelcoming to students with classical liberal views favoring limited government. Rather than pursue his doctorate there, he completed the academic year while spending much of his free time reading the works of Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, and F. A. Hayek.²⁶ During that year he met Donald Gordon, a professor at the University of Washington, at an Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI) event.²⁷ Gordon encouraged Jim to apply to the University of Washington's Ph.D. program.

At the University of Washington, Jim studied under an extraordinary group of economists. He took courses from Douglass North, who later won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences and served on Jim's dissertation committee; Walter Oi; John Floyd; Yoram Barzel; Allan Hynes; Donald Gordon, who taught the history of economic thought; and Tom

24 See Federal Reserve History (n.d.).

25 Public choice emerged as a formal research program during the 1960s. Jim Gwartney's first economics course with Wayne Angell was during his sophomore year (1959–1960), and he graduated with his B.A. in 1962, the year that Buchanan and Tullock published *Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy*, which sparked the public choice revolution. In 1963, Buchanan and Tullock organized the Committee on Non-Market Decision Making, but the term "public choice" was not coined until the group's meeting in Chicago in 1967; that same year, they renamed their group the Public Choice Society. In 1968, the society renamed its journal to *Public Choice*. For more information, see Public Choice Society (n.d.).

26 For further reading on who Jim credits with having a major impact on his intellectual views, see Gwartney (2002: 135–137) and List and Schuler (2023: 1–16).

27 At the time, the organization was known as the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI), which later became the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

Borcherding, who introduced Jim to the works of James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, William Niskanen, and other scholars in the emerging public choice tradition.

Jim considered Milton Friedman and James Buchanan to be his two greatest intellectual influences. Together, Friedman and Buchanan shaped two central pillars of Jim's views: a deep appreciation for the power of markets and an understanding of the incentives influencing decision-making in the public sector.

Jim described Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*, which he first read in 1963, as the most influential book he ever read other than the Bible. Friedman's writings provided the foundation for Jim's market-oriented and classical liberal views, while Buchanan's public choice writings fundamentally shaped how he viewed the political process and the importance of keeping the powers of government limited and widely dispersed. Buchanan's work also inspired Jim to write his own economics textbook, *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, in order to incorporate public choice analysis into principles-level economics instruction. Prior to Jim's textbook, principles of economics texts typically discussed market failure and the role of government in correcting it, while giving little or no attention to government failure or public choice analysis. Correcting that imbalance became one of Jim's primary goals in writing *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, now in its 18th edition.²⁸

A few more of Jim Gwartney's accomplishments and accolades

James Gwartney earned his B.A. in Economics from Ottawa University in 1962 and his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Washington in 1969. Following graduate school, he joined the faculty at Florida State University, where he taught economics for 54 years before retiring in 2022.

Throughout his career, Jim served in numerous leadership positions within the economics profession. He became a member of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1986, served as President of the Association of Private Enterprise Education (1998), President of the Southern Economic Association (2007–2008), Chief Economist of the US Congress's Joint Economic Committee (1999–2000), Director of Florida State University's Gus A. Stavros Center for the Advancement of Free Enterprise and Economic Education (2003–2016), the Stavros Center's Gus A. Stavros Eminent Scholar Chair (2004–2022), and was named Professor Emeritus at FSU in 2022.²⁹

28 Buchanan and Tullock's *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (1962) laid the intellectual foundations for modern public choice economics. Buchanan was awarded the 1986 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his contributions to the theory of public choice (see Nobel Prize, 1986a, 1986b).

29 For Jim's curriculum vitae, see Gwartney (2021).

Jim's many honors reflected the esteem in which he was held by colleagues around the world. In 2008, Universidad Francisco Marroquín awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in Social Science.³⁰ He also received numerous honors from the Association of Private Enterprise Education, including the Distinguished Scholar Award (1995), Adam Smith Award (2004), and, together with Amy, the Clark-Kent-Aronoff Award for service (2022).³¹

As of June 2026, Google Scholar listed Jim with an h-index of 41, an i10-index of 84, and more than 14,700 citations.³² His research appeared in leading academic journals including the *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *Southern Economic Journal*, and the *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, while his commentary also appeared in publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and *Investor's Business Daily*.

Examples of Gwartney's entrepreneurial spirit

Jim's entrepreneurial spirit extended well beyond the classroom and his scholarly research. Throughout his career, he repeatedly helped launch new organizations, initiatives, and enterprises that reflected his commitment to economic freedom, education, and service.

One example was the James Madison Institute (JMI), a free-market public policy organization headquartered in Tallahassee. Founded in 1987 by former Florida State University President Stanley Marshall, the institute benefited greatly from Jim's leadership during its formative years. Randall Holcombe recalled that Jim was instrumental not only in helping establish the institute but also in ensuring its survival during its early "lean" years. Holcombe remarked, "When it went through some lean years in its life, it is no exaggeration to say that it would not have survived without Jim's efforts."³³ Jim continued serving on JMI's Research and Advisory Council throughout the remainder of his life.

Jim's entrepreneurial interests also extended into the private sector. Together with fellow Florida State University professors Joan Haworth, Charles Haworth, and Ephraim Asher, he co-founded Economic Research Services, a consulting firm that specialized in statistical and economic analysis for employment discrimination litigation. The firm's work grew naturally out of Jim's doctoral research on racial income differences, which also resulted in several publications in the *American Economic Review* and other scholarly journals.³⁴

30 See Universidad Francisco Marroquín (2008).

31 For Jim's awards, see Association of Private Enterprise Education (n.d.-a, n.d.-b, and n.d.-c).

32 The h-index is calculated by counting the number of publications for which an author has been cited by other authors at least that same number of times (so, an h-index of 41 means that 41 of Jim's published papers have been cited at least 41 times each. The i-10-index is the number of publications with at least 10 citations. For Jim's scholarly profile, see Google Scholar (n.d.).

33 Holcombe (2024). For more on JMI, see James Madison Institute (2026).

34 See Gwartney (1969, 1970a, and 1970b); Gwartney, Asher, and Haworth (1979); and Haworth, Gwartney, and

Jim's entrepreneurial spirit was evident in many other aspects of his life as well. Whether developing new textbooks, helping create the EFW index, directing an economic education center, helping launch a public policy institute, or assisting in the founding of Element3 Church, he consistently sought to build institutions that would continue influencing others long after his own direct involvement.

One story Jim shared with me offers an amusing glimpse into how his entrepreneurial spirit began to bud at a young age. On September 15, 2020, he told me that at six years old, while growing up on a Kansas farm, he started a duck business. The business, however, had one major flaw: Jim thought they were "so cute" and loved the ducks so much that he couldn't bring himself to sell any of them. Starting with only three or four ducks, he eventually grew his flock to around 100—all of which he considered pets. One day he came home to discover they had all disappeared. His father had sold every one of them. Jim laughed as he told the story, clearly amused by the memory decades later.

A life well lived... what a legacy!

James Gwartney leaves behind an extraordinary legacy as a scholar, teacher, mentor, and advocate for economic freedom. Few individuals have had as great of an impact on the field of economic education. His contributions to economics and economic education continue to influence students, teachers, policymakers, and researchers around the world. Through his textbooks, scholarly research, the EFW index, and numerous other professional endeavors, Jim helped shape how generations of people understand economics and the institutions that foster human flourishing.

Yet Jim's legacy extends well beyond his publications, awards, and professional accomplishments. Those who knew him personally remember not only his brilliance, but also his kindness, humility, generosity, unwavering faith, and joyful spirit. He invested deeply in his students, colleagues, and friends, leaving a lasting impression on countless lives.

I count myself extraordinarily fortunate to have worked alongside Dr. Jim Gwartney and to have learned directly from one of the world's very best economic educators of our time. He profoundly influenced my own development as an economist, educator, and person—as he did for many other students and mentees. I miss my professor, colleague, Ph.D. dissertation advisor, spiritual mentor, father figure, and friend, but I remain deeply grateful for the years I was able to learn from him.

Jim often devoted his research to understanding the institutions that enable individuals and societies to flourish. In many ways, his own life reflected those same ideals. His legacy

Haworth (1975).

serves as a reminder that a meaningful career is measured not only by scholarly accomplishments, but also by the lives one influences through character, generosity, and faithful service.

Those wishing to further explore Jim’s remarkable life may visit [JamesGwartneyLegacy.org](https://jamesgwartneylegacy.org), a digital archive dedicated to preserving Jim Gwartney’s legacy through materials such as photographs, publications, tributes, and other archival material.

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