

Teaching Portfolio

Dr. James Curtis Fraser

January 2026



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— Dr. Francis Pearman, Assistant Professor of Education, Stanford University, 2019

"Jim — Thank you for accompanying me on this journey — from coaching me through admission weekend, to encouraging my early involvement with Cayce United, from introducing me to the Planning Department to bringing me onto the People's Guide, from expanding my reading list to collaborating on writing projects. You have played a pivotal role in my development as a scholar. Thank you for investing in my growth and providing so many opportunities for me to get connected to work that is meaningful and relevant."

— Dr. Amie Thurber, Vanderbilt University, February 2018

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY & APPROACH

Intellectual Equivalence as Pedagogical Foundation

My teaching and mentoring philosophy begins with two premises that fundamentally inform my practices. The first premise is the imperative to engage each student regarding their current status and maturity as they relate to academic and professional development. This perspective builds from the humble recognition that I, too, was mentored and had to develop these qualities. The second premise is that it is necessary to establish a mentoring relationship based on intellectual equivalence. This orientation informs my teaching and fosters students' confidence as scholars and practitioners.

Experiential Learning That Produces Scholars

The most important aspect of my teaching is to show students that we are a learning community and that they are an active part of it. I present content in a way that builds progressively, increasing in complexity to challenge students to synthesize what they are studying and to express their understanding through hands-on learning.

Student-Centered Scholarship

Students in my courses engage in both class-based and individual studies, applying urban studies theories and methods to real-world research projects. This gives students the chance to synthesize, evaluate, and create original research that has led to actual journal publications.

I have published over 20 peer-reviewed articles with both undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, I have co-published several op-ed pieces with students from my classes in *The Tennessean* on topics such as transit-oriented development, affordable housing, and equitable neighborhood development. These experiences help students create strong arguments based on their coursework and address important social issues in both local and national settings (For example, see Appendix A).

Pedagogical Example 1: The Census Study

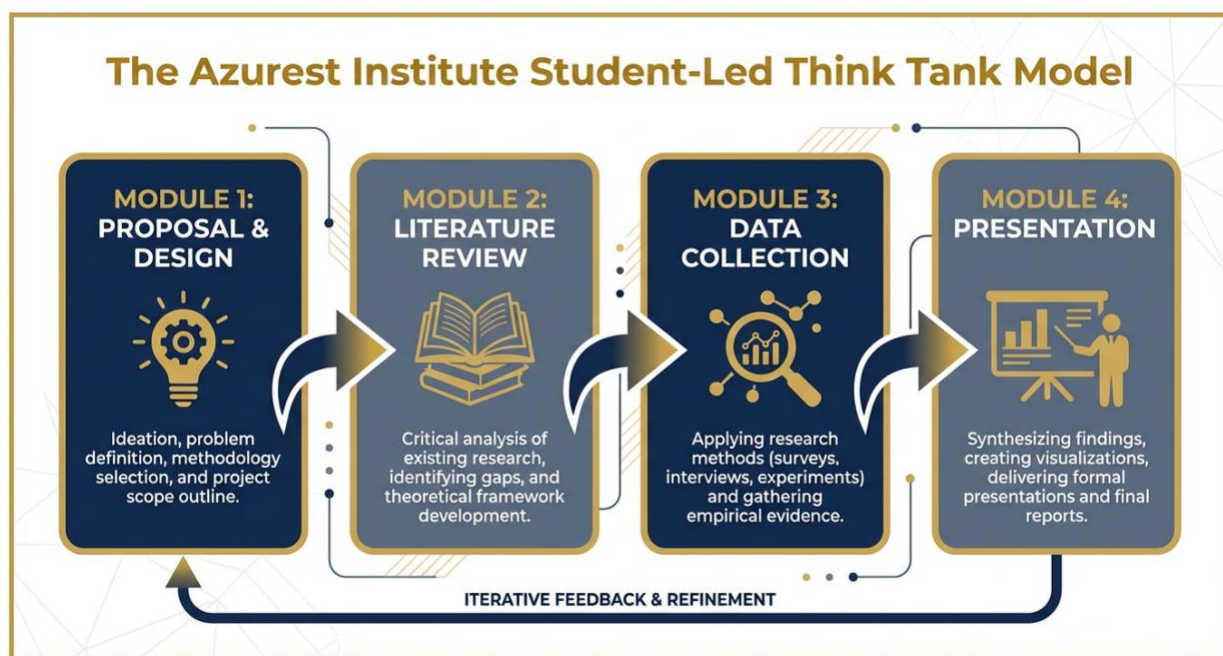
In a course on urban policy and community development at Vanderbilt University, we collaborated with the Chestnut Hill neighborhood in Nashville. Students created a project to replicate the Census long-form to assess how much the American Community Survey (ACS) estimates might be off, given that the area's median income appeared high.

After conducting our study with an appropriate sample size, we found that the estimates were indeed inaccurate for this small census tract. We then calculated the probability that ACS statistics would be inaccurate in each tract across the U.S. and found it was at least 25% in some tracts. Based on this, my post-doc collaborated with the class to co-publish an article demonstrating that community development funds and affordable housing being built in Chestnut Hill would not be accessible to nearly every household in the area because they did not meet the income limits (see 2013, "How the ACS gets it wrong: the story of the American Community Survey and a small, inner city neighborhood" in *Applied Geography*, 45, p. 292-302).

This demonstrates the power of experiential learning—students conducting thorough research that yields publishable results and influences policy practice.

Pedagogical Example 2: Innovation & the Azurest Institute- Building the Next Generation of Urban Policy Leaders

I established the **Azurest Institute** at Virginia State University. This transformative educational program demonstrates VSU students are skilled, confident, and engaged researchers prepared to tackle the complex challenges facing our cities. Named after the historic home designed by Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984), a pioneering African American artist and architect who taught at Virginia State University, the Institute honors VSU's legacy of innovation while equipping students for careers in urban policy, community development, and public service.



Empowering Students to Drive Academic Innovation and Real-World Solutions through Rigorous Inquiry.

Azurest Institute Model

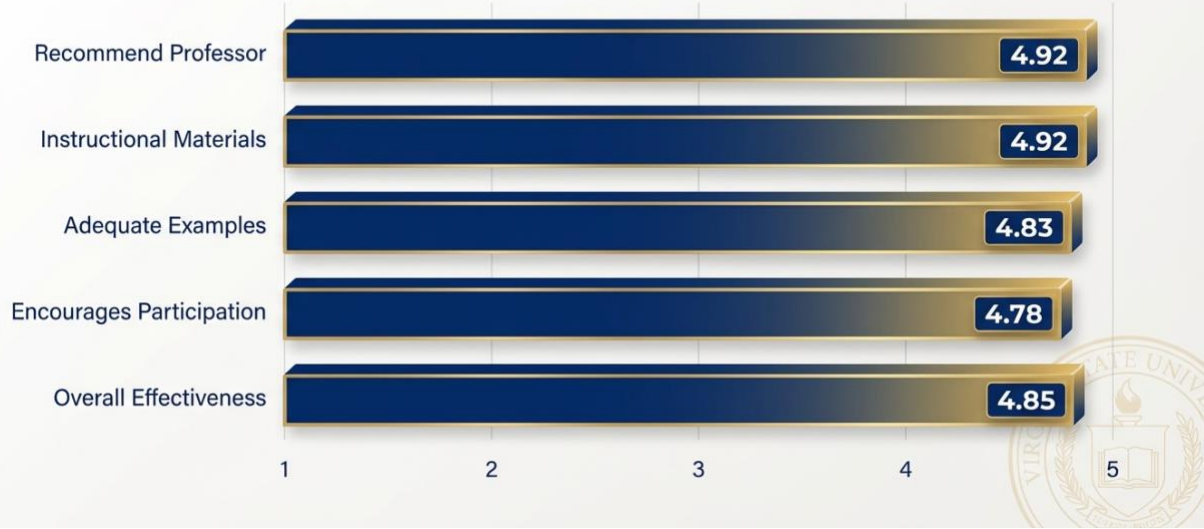
TEACHING EVALUATIONS: SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE

Quantitative Evidence of Teaching Quality

My teaching evaluations reflect consistent excellence over 25 years at four universities. At Virginia State University, my scores regularly exceed the averages of the university, the college, and the department across all metrics.

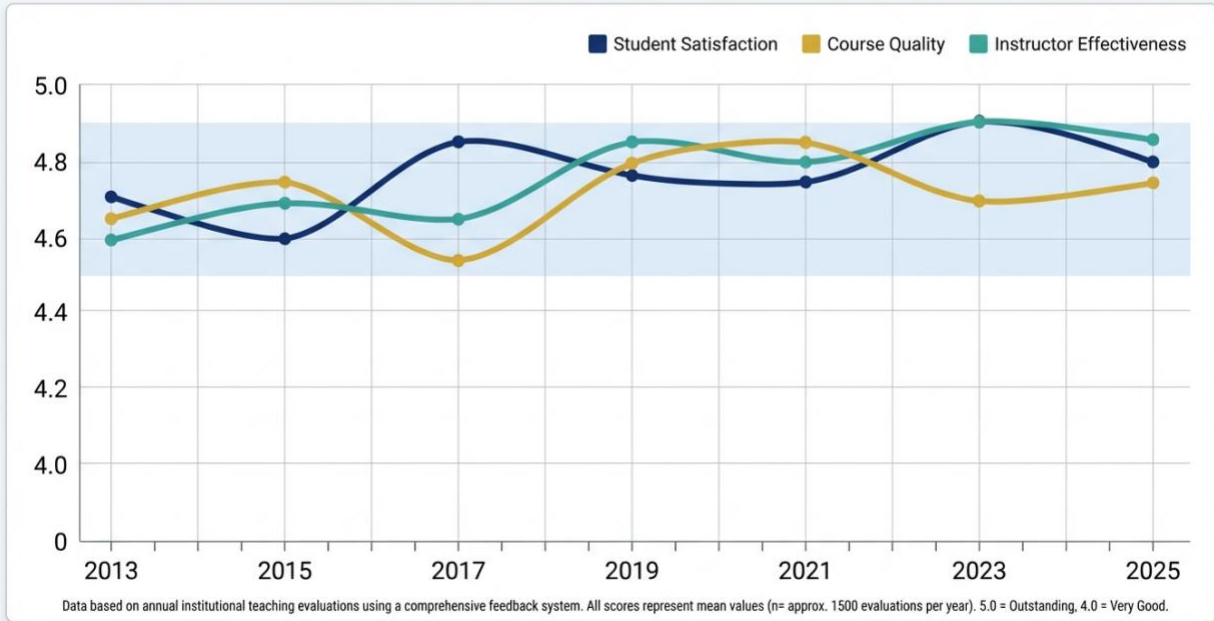
Student Evaluation Excellence 2024-2025

Virginia State University



Teaching Evaluation Scores

Sustained Teaching Excellence: 12-Year Evaluation Trends



Evaluation Trends

Key Performance Metrics:

- "I would recommend this professor to other students" — **4.92/5.0** (Summer I 2025)
- "Instructional material was helpful" — **4.92/5.0** (Summer I 2025)
- "Professor provided adequate examples" — **4.83/5.0** (Summer I 2025)
- "Professor encouraged questions and participation" — **4.78/5.0** (Spring 2025 Theory)
- Consistent performance above university and department averages across all metrics

Multi-Year Trends: 2013-2025

My evaluations show remarkable consistency over time:

- **2013-2017** (Vanderbilt): Average 4.6-4.8/5.0 across all courses
- **2024-2025** (VSU): Average 4.8-4.9/5.0 across all courses

This sustained excellence demonstrates my ability to adapt pedagogical approaches to different institutional contexts and student populations while maintaining the highest teaching standards.

What Students Say: Voices of Impact:

Virginia State University Students

"Professor Fraser challenges you to think critically about urban issues and provides the tools to conduct real research. The Azurest Institute changed my career path—I'm now applying to graduate programs in public policy."

"I never thought I could be a researcher until this class. Dr. Fraser believed in us and showed us we could produce work that matters."

Vanderbilt University Students

"It was the best class I have been a part of here at Vanderbilt."

"Overall, I learned so much in this class, and I was able to connect it with things I have learned in my other classes and in other experiences."

"Fraser really gets it. He has such an admirable, honest, full-hearted approach to teaching."

"Dr. Fraser is by far one of my favorite professors I have had in my time at Vanderbilt."

"Easily one of the best and most useful classes I have taken at Vanderbilt."

"This was one of the most applicable classes I've taken at Vanderbilt so far. I know I will use a lot of what I learned when I become a working adult in the real world."

"This class really forced me to think critically and educated me on a lot of issues that I frankly did not even know existed."

"Loved this class. Seriously, everyone who comes through Vanderbilt should have to take some kind of environmental or geographic class."

"I learned considerably more from this course than I have from other courses. It certainly challenged me intellectually, improved my writing, and deepened my understanding about a topic that I would have never realized is so complex."

"Wow! We were able to cover a broad spectrum of topics around housing policy and community development, which was amazing."

"The classroom discussion was incredible. This was one of the best classroom experiences I have had while at Peabody."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATIONS

Quality Matters Certification

In January 2024, I earned the Quality Matters "Designing Your Online Course" (DYOC) certification. Quality Matters is a global organization leading in quality assurance for online and innovative digital teaching and learning environments. This certification has improved my ability to design effective online and hybrid courses at Virginia State University, ensuring that my digital pedagogy meets the highest standards for student engagement and learning outcomes.

AI-Enhanced Pedagogy

I have gained expertise in incorporating artificial intelligence tools into research methods teaching. In my courses, students learn to use tools such as Claude AI, ChatGPT, Notebook LM, and Microsoft Copilot as research aids—not shortcuts. All AI-assisted work must be documented, critically assessed, and ethically used. This method prepares students for 21st-century research settings while upholding academic integrity.

COURSES TAUGHT: BREADTH AND DEPTH

Virginia State University (2023–Present)

- SOCI 101: Introduction to Sociology (multiple sections, face-to-face and online)
- SOCI 318: Sociological Theory
- SOCI 352: Urban Issues (featuring the Azurest Institute)
- SOCI 419: Applied Research Methods

University of North Carolina Asheville (2022–2023)

- Urban Policy Seminar
- Urban Sociology
- Senior Capstone
- Research Methods

Vanderbilt University (2007–2018)

- AMER 4000/8000: The American City
- AMER 4000: Urban Geography and Planning
- AMER 4000: Urbanization and the Environment
- AMER 4000: Gentrification and Uneven Urban Development
- AMER 8000: Social Justice and the City
- HOD 1200/2100: Understanding Organizations
- HOD 2610/3600: Community Development and Urban Policy
- HOD 3610: Development Project, Design and Evaluation
- HOD 2690/3650: Environmental Geography and the City
- HOD 7500: Critical Research Methods and Epistemology
- Graduate Reading Seminar: Geographic Thought
- Theories of Inequality
- Sustainability, Justice, and the City
- Human Dimensions of Environmental Change

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2000–2007)

- Urban Social Geography
- Urban Sociology
- Urban Geography: Spaces of Transformation
- Qualitative Methods in Social Research
- Research Design
- Social and Physical Dimensions of Flooding
- Global Dimensions of Community Development

Additional Teaching Experience

- Introduction to Sociology (multiple institutions)
- Social Statistics
- Social Problems
- Research Methods
- Approximately 100 Independent Studies supervised

EXCERPTS FROM STUDENT LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Dr. Francis Pearman, Stanford University

"Dr. Fraser is many things as an instructor: thorough, responsive, prepared, critical, encouraging, and insightful. As I am beginning my early years as a professor and think about the type of instructor I want to be, I think of Dr. Fraser... The course I took with him, his leadership within it, and his ability to foster community, critical thinking, and top-notch scholarship changed the trajectory of my life in the academy—all for the better."

Cameron Hightower, Vanderbilt Graduate

"Jim and I worked on a project from 2017–2019 surrounding our interest in urban neighborhood change and the racial dynamics and potential injustices occurring in these contexts... One of the factors that made our research project run smoothly was Jim's breadth of connections across Nashville. He had made so many relationships through past projects... it was easy to find research participants because of the trust and relationships that Jim had built. Nashville residents, especially those in under-resourced areas, see his genuine commitment to justice and the community and gladly participated in our study."

Dr. Amie Thurber, Vanderbilt University

"Jim — Thank you for accompanying me on this journey — from coaching me through admission weekend, to encouraging my early involvement with Cayce United, from introducing me to the Planning Department to bringing me onto the People's Guide, from expanding my reading list to collaborating on writing projects. You have played a pivotal role in my development as a scholar. Thank you for investing in my growth and providing so many opportunities for me to get connected to work that is meaningful and relevant."

Lindsey Gardner, M.Ed., Michigan State University Extension

"Dr. Fraser was one of my favorite professors; he was engaging in the classroom and always able to tie theory and research to applied practice. It seemed his classroom was 'without walls' as we would venture into the community and observe firsthand how the concepts he taught were relevant outside of campus... He taught me to be a lifelong learner, an actively engaged community member, and he undoubtedly shaped my career path for the better."

CONCLUSION: A VISION FOR ENDOWED LEADERSHIP

An endowed professorship in public policy requires a scholar who can bridge the academic and practice worlds—someone who produces rigorous research, develops the next generation of policy leaders, and translates knowledge into action.

My career exemplifies this integration:

As a researcher, I have secured over \$12 million in funding, published in top-tier journals, and produced scholarship that has informed federal legislation and municipal policy frameworks.

As a teacher, I have maintained outstanding evaluations for 25 years across multiple universities, pioneered innovative pedagogical approaches, co-authored over 20 peer-reviewed articles with students, and my students have gone on to have meaningful careers as academics at top institutions or in the professional world.

As a practitioner, I have served as Senior Policy Advisor to a major city, created policy frameworks adopted by municipal governments, and testified before the U.S. Congress.

This is the model I present: a scholar-practitioner who applies policy expertise in the classroom, involves students in real-world research, and ensures that academic knowledge reaches decision-makers. Students in my courses don't just learn about public policy—they practice it, publish it, and see it put into action.

I am ready to bring this vision to an endowed professorship, where I can expand these innovations, mentor doctoral students, and continue building bridges between the academy and the policy world.