1. The Center as a “Necessary or Desirable” Organizational Structure

The Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity benefits from its organization as a “Center” in several ways. First, and most obviously, almost the entirety of the Center’s work is multi-disciplinary—touching on issues in economics, education, public health, public policy, social work, medicine, discrimination, politics, etc. Little of the Center’s research is “legal” in the traditional sense. We consistently work across disciplines.

Such efforts are made easier by the “Center” structure since we aren’t simply a department of the law school. Affiliations, both within and beyond the university, are eased. We work regularly, for example, with the NC Justice Center, the NAACP and N.C. Central’s Institute for Civil Engagement. Additionally, the Center has an advisory board drawn from strong scholars across the campus, rather than merely within the law school. And we can appoint Center faculty fellows, from other departments and disciplines. Allison De Marco, our new research fellow, is a faculty member at the UNC School of Social Work and investigator with the Frank Porter Graham Institute.

It is also perhaps candid to say that “Centers” typically facilitate fundraising outside the pool of traditional donors of a school’s funders. That has clearly been the case with the Poverty Center – drawing significant support from foundations and individuals interested in poverty or in the Poverty Center’s work, who would not otherwise contribute to the support of the School of Law.

2. Work of the Center

Publication

The UNC Poverty Center continues to produce a significant array of traditional academic research publications. Those include earlier works:

- *Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream* (Edwards, Crain & Kalleberg);
- “Wealth Inequality and the Eroding Middle Class,” Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy
• “Poverty Summit Proceedings,” Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal

More recent publications include:
• “Southern Poverty, Southern Politics,” in A Way Forward: A Globally Competitive South
• “Citizens United”, Georgia State Law Review
• “Rankings, Economic Exclusion and the Future of American Legal Education,” Journal of Legal Education
• “State Budget Challenges and the Scourge of Poverty,” Duke Journal of Constitutional Law and Public Policy
• “Wages, Work, Privilege and Legal Education,” Harvard Law & Policy Review
• “Judicial Abdication and Equal Access to the Civil Justice System,” Case Western Law Review
• “Invisible North Carolina,” Progressive Populist
• “The Roberts Court and Access to Civil Justice,” Case Western Law Review

A major book on North Carolina poverty is scheduled for publication, next year, by the UNC Press.

The Poverty Center publishes, as well, empirical studies of poverty in North Carolina and its brutal consequences. Examples of such major demographic reports and commissioned policy studies include:
• The North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Report on the delivery of legal aid services in the state (Irvine)
• “Documenting Poverty, Economic Distress and Challenge in North Carolina” (Nichol and Hunt)
• “Racial Wealth Disparity in North Carolina” (Nichol and Hunt)
• “Tracing the Causes of Racial Wealth Disparity” (Nichol)
• “Adult Care Homes in Public Housing Facilities: A Feasibility Study,” (Hunt)
• “The 287 (g) Program: The Costs and Consequences of Local Immigration Enforcement in North Carolina Communities” (Nguyen and Gill)
• “Solutions For Northside: Going Beyond Chapel Hill’s 2011 Northside and Pine Knoll Community Plan” (Hunt and Spong)
• “Neighborhood Level Foreclosures in Durham County” (three reports) (Hunt)
• “Urban Poverty Data Update for Durham and Mecklenburg Counties” (Templeton).

Finally, Poverty Center staff members publish very extensively in the North Carolina public press on issues of economic hardship in the state. Examples include:
• “Supremely Indifferent to Historic Injustice,” News & Observer, March 6, 2012 (Nichol)
• “A Legacy of Action Against Poverty,” News & Observer, April 6, 2012 (Nichol)
• “We Simply Won’t Look at Poverty,” News & Observer, June 3, 2012 (Nichol)
• “The South is Tops in Poverty,” News & Observer, September 29, 2012 (Nichol)
• “In North Carolina, Poverty Pervades as We Evade,” News & Observer, January 27, 2013 (Nichol)
• “What Are We Doing For the Least of These?” News & Observer, February 24, 2013, (Nichol)
• “Full of Courage, Smarts, Yet Facing an Empty Future,” News & Observer, April 27, 2013 (Nichol)
• “The Picked on in Brunswick County,” News & Observer, June 29, 2013 (Nichol)
• “In a Growing State, a Growing Hunger,” News & Observer, July 28, 2013 (Nichol)
• “In Urban North Carolina, Deep Pockets of Misery are Masked,” September 29, 2013, News & Observer (Nichol)
• “The Other Durham: Poverty Up in Poorest Area,” Durham Herald, October 25, 2013 (Polich)
• “Poverty Up Amidst Charlotte’s Riches,” Charlotte Observer, October 9, 2013 (Irvine)
• “Most of North Carolina’s Poor Cannot Afford Legal Representation,” News & Observer, October 25, 2013 (Nichol)
• “Selfless Saints Support North Carolina’s Poor With Little Help,” News & Observer, November 24, 2013 (Nichol)
• “From Silence to Savagery,” News & Observer, December 28, 2013 (Nichol)
• “Higher Wages Key to Escaping Poverty,” News & Observer, August 3, 2014 (Nichol)
• “Where Child Care Fits into New Jobs Picture,” News & Observer, July 31, 2014 (Polich)
• “Law Takes a Beating in N.C. Voucher Saga,” News & Observer, June 21, 2014 (Nichol), and many others.
Public Education and Engagement

Much of the work of the Center is designed to shine a light on problems of poverty and economic hardship in North Carolina—our state’s greatest challenge. This entails, of course, extensive fieldwork across North Carolina and calls for efforts to reach a broader audience than occurs through academic journal publication.

Throughout much of 2012, for example, in partnership with the NAACP, N.C. Central, and the North Carolina Justice Center, the Poverty Center helped to organize and conduct a “Truth and Hope Poverty Tour.” The tour, taking place in five legs over several months, brought scores of leaders, funders, professors, students, journalists, ministers and service providers to 23 cities and towns across the entirety of the state and into communities of hardship and deprivation unfamiliar to many. We met with thousands of Tar Heels, in town meetings, in public halls, in homes, shelters and community centers. The tour shone a light on poverty in North Carolina with surprising effectiveness. (The tour has just been expressly replicated by poverty advocates in New York.) It concluded with a large and vibrant summit in Rocky Mount. The tour generated very extensive press and electronic media coverage locally, statewide and nationally.

Following on the tour, the Center developed and published an extensive, year long series, appearing monthly throughout the entirety of 2013 in the Raleigh News & Observer titled “Seeing the Invisible – Putting a Face on Poverty in North Carolina.” The articles were published on Sundays, in a longer than normal format, with graphics and photographs, reaching a wide audience. The complete series was published by the News & Observer as an e-book as well. The series focused, often, on eastern North Carolina. It looked at hunger, homelessness, immigration, electric bills, wages, charitable work, urban poverty, access to the education and justice systems, race, income and wealth disparity, zoning abuse, and government decision-making. A similar poverty series, based on this work, has recently been started by scholars in Maine.

Building from these two broad experiences, the Poverty Center has launched a two-year project entitled “Facing Poverty in North Carolina Communities.” We realized there is a significant vacuum of poverty research, data, exploration and illuminating narrative at the local level across the state. When we focused deeply on poverty in Durham and, especially, Charlotte, over the summer, our reports and efforts triggered extensive attention in the Charlotte Observer, the Durham Herald and the Raleigh News & Observer. The Durham and Charlotte newspapers, particularly, asked to publish more of the research. The Mecklenburg County Board of Commissions announced that it was creating a new poverty commission – based on our findings. And it sought our assistance. We also learned, through the tour and the poverty series, that narrative is frequently a more effective method of exploring the challenges of poverty than demographic study. So we are using narrative and data-driven research to explore the challenges of intense poverty in 12-15 North Carolina communities throughout 2015 and 2016. Work in Charlotte, Salisbury, Hickory, Lumberton, Durham and Elizabeth City is already underway. It will provide a deepened picture of economic hardship in locales across North Carolina.
We have also been delighted to produce, through the work of Brian McDonald, a teacher at Jordan High School in Durham, and Poverty Center Fellow, a terrific curriculum for the study of poverty in high schools. McDonald’s curriculum has been picked up in other North Carolina high schools and he has presented on it nationally. It is comprised of six units: The American Dream, Financial Literacy, the Great Depression, Measuring Poverty, Populations, The War on Poverty. It appears in full on the Poverty Center website.

Finally, the director of the Poverty Center, over the past six years, has given hundreds of speeches about poverty in North Carolina to civic, educational, religious, legal, social, business and policy groups across the state. He has delivered significant addresses about poverty and equality at UNC-CH, N.C. Central, Duke, N.C. State, Wake Forest, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Greensboro, Fayetteville State, North Carolina A&T, Elizabeth City State University, East Carolina, Shaw University, Johnson C. Smith University, Campbell University, Elon University, Bennett College, Charlotte Law School, Rockingham Community College, Brunswick Community College, Blue Ridge Community College, Lenoir-Rhyne University and others. He has given keynote addresses at major poverty conferences at the Harvard Law School, in New York, DC, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Montgomery, Memphis, Cleveland, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Providence, Portland, Boston, Baltimore, Boulder, Boise and elsewhere. Finally, the director has made frequent appearances addressing poverty issues on UNC-TV, WRAL-TV and WUNC.

Foreclosure Project

Heather Hunt oversees a large, funded, research project on home foreclosures in Durham County. It has produced an array of reports available on the Poverty Center website. Data is collected by students from foreclosure files at the Durham Courthouse. The files contain a rich repository of information on foreclosure at the household level, including address, mortgage amount, originating lender, existence of related bankruptcy proceedings, and the like. Although singularly useful as a source of information about local foreclosures, few organizations have the capacity to engage in file review, which is time-consuming and laborious. Our ability to use law students to collect this data makes it possible to do—and share—this much of this project’s work.

Once the data is collected, the foreclosure addresses are mapped. By mapping the locations where foreclosures are occurring, we identify foreclosure “hot spots”—where foreclosures are occurring at an elevated rates or in unusual clusters. This also allows us to analyze foreclosures by census tract. Using American Community Survey data, we can describe the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods with relatively high numbers and rates of foreclosures. We can also estimate the “spillover” costs of foreclosure (that is, the depreciation in home value for homes located near foreclosed properties). The data is explored in detail in a series of reports begun last fall.
Another round of reports examining a larger data set will be published over the next few months.

North Carolina Low Wage Worker Study

Last August, in partnership with Professor William Lester of the Department of City & Regional Planning and an array of his graduate students, the Poverty Center launched a study of the demographics of low-wage workers and industries in North Carolina. Dr. Lester is perhaps the nation’s leading expert on the impact of minimum wage standards on economic development and prosperity. As a rich supplement to the Poverty Center’s work on expanding urban poverty in Charlotte, Lester’s economic development workshop will explore the characteristics, trends, opportunities and experience of minimum and near minimum wage workers across the state. The study will focus, as well, on low wage work in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to supplement the interviews with minimum wage workers presently being undertaken by the Poverty Center, in partnership with Crisis Assistance Ministries in Charlotte. The joint project with Dr. Lester will also produce a free-standing website to explore the nature and characteristics of low wage work in North Carolina.

Community Empowerment Fund

Joe Polich and Heather Hunt also work extensively with the Community Empowerment Fund in Chapel Hill. The Poverty Center was involved in launching the Fund with a group of UNC undergraduates several years ago. Polich provides legal assistance, and acts as an intake point for legal aid of Pittsboro – serving over 100 clients, doing extensive expunction work. He also develops training sessions for volunteers and undergraduate students, and helps students examine developing poverty and homelessness issues in Orange Count and, now, Durham. They also provide such services at the IFC men’s shelter in Chapel Hill, and Polich works extensively as a leadership team member with the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness. Hunt serves on the board of this remarkable and much-lauded group and also provides legal assistance and advice.

The Center also:

- Collaborates with other individuals and organizations on campus and across state to address poverty.
- Connects university resources and students to external needs
- Supports economic development in eastern NC
- Promotes research and discussion of poverty for a variety of audiences
- Guides and supports students from all disciplines

Events

Partial list of public events sponsored by the Poverty Center since 2007:
2014-15

September 29, 2014
Lecture: Michael Gerhardt, Three Judge Panels and Constitutional Claims

November 2, 2014
Screening: Generation of Change: Bill Friday, Terry Sanford, and North Carolina from the 1920s to 1972

March 3, 2015
Panel: The State of Low Wage Work in North Carolina

2013-14

November 25, 2013
Conference: Poverty, Partnerships and the Public Good: A Call for Engagement by North Carolina Institutions

November 5, 2013
Presentation: Democracy and American Campaign Finance: A Discussion of McCutcheon v. FEC

February 20, 2014
Screening and panel discussion: Inequality for All

2012-13

September 24, 2012
Screening: Truth and Hope Poverty Tour Documentary

March 5, 2013
Presentation: The War on Working People in NC and Beyond: Why Labor Law Matters

March 21
Presentation: Wage Theft in North Carolina

August 8, 2013
Screening: Story of America: A Nation Divided

2011-12

September 28, 2011
Discussion: ACORN and American Democracy: A Talk with John Atlas

October 10, 2011
Presentation: *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in North Carolina and the Federal Courts*

November 11, 2011
Conference: *Practicing Poverty Law in North Carolina: 3 Million Clients... and Growing!*

January 19 and 20, 2012
March 2 and 3, 2012
April 30 and May 1, 2012
*Truth and Hope Tour of Poverty in North Carolina*

August 11, 2012
Summit: *Truth and Hope Poverty Tour Summit*

**2010-11**

September 16, 2010
Presentation: *Poor People’s Justice: Denying Access in Civil Cases*

October 10, 2010
Screening: *Brother Towns/Pueblos Hermanos*

December 2, 2010
Panel following *The Parchman Hour: Songs and Stories of the ’61 Freedom Riders*, a theatrical production by Mike Wiley.

January 18, 2011
Speaker: Larry Gibson on mountaintop removal, poverty and environmental issues.

February 1, 2011
Panel: *Poverty and Economic Justice Scholarship*

March 28, 2011
Conference: *A North Carolina Summit: Progress and Economic Justice in a Time of Crisis*

**2009-10**

September 17, 2009
Panel: *The Community Reinvestment Act*

October 30, 2009
Conference: *Access to Justice in North Carolina: A Right to Counsel in Civil Cases*

February 22, 2010
Panel: *Mental Health Reform Since Olmstead: A Discussion of the Marlo M. Case*

March 2, 2010
Lecture: Brenda Wright, *The Citizens United Case: Corporate Speech and the Future of Democracy*

**2008-2009**

September 22, 2008
Discussion: *North Carolina's Invisible Poor: Who Are They and What Can We Do to Help?*

February 9, 2009
Lecture: Lawrence Mishel, *The Squeeze Behind Us, the Pain Ahead and How to Reach Shared Prosperity*

March 12, 2009
Lecture: Michael Sherraden

March 30 – April 3, 2009
Poverty Awareness Week: panel and screening of documentary, *Change Comes Knocking: The Story of the NC Fund* and keynote address by Howard Fuller.

April 9, 2009
Conference: *Poverty and the Recession in North Carolina: Challenges and Opportunities*

April 13, 2009
Theatrical adaptation and panel discussion: *Blood Done Sign My Name*

April 16, 2009
Panel: *Immigration Policy in North Carolina: The 287(g) Program and Local Enforcement of Immigration Law*

**2007-08**

November 4 and 5, 2007
Conference: *Wealth Inequality and the Eroding Middle Class*

March 25, 2008
Premiere documentary screening: *Change Comes Knocking: The Story of the NC Fund*

June 3, 2008
Live conference and videoconference: *Men's Health Disparities: Implications for Research and Intervention*

3. Student Involvement in the Poverty Center
Students—both from UNC and other universities—are extensively involved in the work of the Poverty Center. They are a central reason the Poverty Center can be so productive on a relatively lean budget. Each year, roughly 15-20 students work officially with the Poverty Center. Most often, they are hired as research assistants—in the largest numbers during the summer, but also in the fall and spring semesters. Students also work for the Center as part of the law school’s externship program (for course credit), N.C. Central’s law school internship program, the College of William & Mary’s internship program, and those of other institutions. Z. Smith Reynolds sponsors undergraduate fellows at the Poverty Center. Law students also conduct poverty research in independent studies with Professor Nichol (for credit). UNC law students work at the Center as volunteers on pro bono projects. The Poverty Center also regularly hires graduate students from several disciplines to work on its demographic studies.

Student research is frequently published on the Poverty Center website. Student research has also been extensively quoted and reported on by major North Carolina newspapers. Beyond this, of course, students participate regularly in Poverty Center programs, both at the law school and on the main campus. The Poverty Summits we have held on campus have been very heavily attended by students. Several dozen students, from UNC-CH and from NC Central, accompanied us on various legs of the Truth and Hope Poverty Tour. The Poverty Center has worked extensively with Professor Ferrel Guillory’s journalism classes—resulting in research and publication experiences for journalism undergraduates—as well as with other classes as guest lecturers, source of projects and service learning placement. And, as explained above, the Poverty Center works in partnership with Dr. Lester’s graduate students. I should add, perhaps, that the Poverty Center’s two employees are former (now graduated) UNC law students.

The Poverty Center is also in the early stages of an unfolding collaboration with the Campus Y and the Bonner Scholars program. The Poverty Center, taking advantage of its field work in distressed communities, particularly in eastern North Carolina, will help place Bonner summer interns in high-poverty urban and rural areas across the state, often in or near their hometowns. The pilot project, suggested by the Campus Y, would involve ten seniors in its first year of operation—tentatively 2016.

4. Operating on Limited Budgets

The last two questions concern levels of in-kind and public support that must be answered by the financial department of the law school. I understand that it has already done so. The Center’s budget and its payments are made through the law school budgeting office. To the extent that the question asks “how can the Center operate on its limited budget?”—the answer is simple and clearly within the Poverty Center’s domain. The Poverty Center has one full-time employee, Joe Polich, a modestly paid postdoctoral fellow on a non-renewable, two-year appointment. The assistant director, Heather Hunt is a 2/3 time employee. The Director receives a $7,500 stipend and works principally as a traditional law professor. Students work in relatively large numbers, but they are hired as research assistants, credit-based interns, or they work as volunteers.