The Kenan Institute Poverty, Ethics and Policy Lab is part of a larger project called The Moral Challenges of Poverty. The overarching goals of this project are to raise awareness and a sense of urgency among the public about the ongoing prevalence of poverty and inequality in North Carolina; to analyze competing ethical principles and their resulting policy prescriptions; and to educate future leaders about the human and economic costs of poverty and the moral challenge it poses in a democracy.

In the lab we aim to reinvigorate interdisciplinary learning about poverty, guided by ethical questions about the root causes of and effective interventions into poverty. We also seek to create products that will move the conversation out into the communities of North Carolina. Finally, we seek to build community between students at UNC and Duke who share an interest in working on poverty in this state.

The lab has pedagogical goals that are shaped by our commitment to ethical teaching and learning environments. We want to create an atmosphere conducive to productive collaboration, creative new approaches to material, and interdisciplinary insights. We believe these will evolve in a physical space that nurtures relationships and encourages ongoing interaction. Students will find that mentorship and guidance from faculty, graduate assistants, and community members happen not just occasionally, but routinely.

Students from both Duke and UNC will enroll in a course team taught by the two faculty directors, historians Robert Korstad (Duke) and James Leloudis (UNC). The course, The History of Poverty, will meet on Wednesday evenings from in the Kenan Institute lab room. In addition to the seminar meetings, students will be expected to work 3-5 hours in the lab each week in small groups or individually, in collaboration with faculty directors, lab director Rachel Seidman, and/or graduate student lab fellows.

We imagine that the seminar will convene once a week in the late afternoon or evening, in order to facilitate the presence of UNC students. In addition to that time, we will expect students to spend 3 hours per week in the laboratory, generally in small groups, occasionally individually, often in consultation with either Bob, Rachel, or less frequently, Jim Leloudis. Bob Korstad will use office space for one entire day per week at least, and it could be space that he shares with Leloudis. It would also provide space for members of the faculty colloquium who may mentor individual students in the lab and/or be working with graduate students who are participating.