Loyola law students try food stamp diet for hunger awareness
By Jerry Crimmins
November 11, 2010

Twenty law students at Loyola University Chicago School of Law are trying to imitate life on food stamps this week by each spending no more than a dollar for every meal.

"Monday and Tuesday were the worst," said Jonathan Motto, 24, from Palos Heights, the president of the Student Bar Association at the school.

"I was really tired and hungry all the time."

Ian Barney, 26, from Beverly, said, "The only thing I can think about is food.

"My perspective has been changed on living on food stamps," Barney said. "I thought if you only budgeted right, you could make it work. But even if you budgeted right, that amount you're getting is not nearly enough to be nutritional, to live your life healthily and happily."

Barney said he is 6 feet 5 inches tall and more than 200 pounds. This week, between his skimpy breakfast and lunch, he said, "I'm starving and I'm lethargic. It's really obvious. ... Yesterday, I had a really hard time concentrating and doing [school] work in the morning. I was so hungry until lunch."

Barney has been eating a bowl of cereal each morning for breakfast and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a banana for lunch.

For supper, his big meal, he eats pasta with no sauce, but with olive oil instead, and sprinkled with cheese and a little broccoli.

The Loyola students are allotted approximately the amount of money for food Illinois gives to individuals who receive food stamps, according to professor Emily Benfer, director of the Health Justice Project at the Law School.

Motto said the Food Stamp Challenge is a first-time event that was the idea of the Student Bar Association.

This week is also Hunger Week 2010 throughout the university. That event includes education, awareness of hunger "across the globe" and fundraising.

Motto said since the Food Stamp Challenge began Sunday, his breakfast has been either two waffles or one yogurt.

He allowed himself an apple for a mid-morning snack, but he only has three apples, so he is eating them Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

"I drink water for the entire week, no coffee," Motto said. "That's been hard, too."
Plus, Motto likes to snack on pretzels or chips when he studies. This week, that's out.

"I'm hungry," said law student Angela Inzano, 23, from Cleveland, who also took the challenge. "I'm hungry even right after I've eaten.

"You smell food everywhere, and I get tired earlier I've noticed," Inzano said, "probably from lack of fresh, good food in your diet and from not having coffee.

"It affects your mood, too. I've noticed maybe I'm a little shorter with people. Being hungry, it's interesting how it affects your life."

Asked why he took the challenge, Barney said he went to Jesuit schools for high school, when he attended St. Ignatius in Chicago, and college, when he attended Loyola, and now law school.

"I feel like the Jesuit commitment to service is important to me," he said. "We need people who are willing to recognize the problems that people in need face, and this is just one way to do that, one way to raise awareness about the issues surrounding hunger and poverty."

Some of the students who signed up for the Food Stamp Challenge have been posting their experiences on a Loyola blog at blogs.luc.edu/blackacre.

The students on the challenge wear buttons, and say their classmates have generally been kind to them. The challengers are not able to accept food.

But one blogger, Aileen Che, wrote, "Some people are having too much fun buying food [especially Starbucks] and eating it in front of me. You know who you are."

Two members of the administration are also taking the Food Stamp Challenge: Jean M. Gaspardo, assistant dean for student affairs, and Christine Heaton, coordinator of mandatory continuing legal education and law school events.

The Food Stamp Challenge is coordinated by Chaundre White of the Student Bar Association.