

## What if a Park Bench was Your Bed?: Hamline Students Learn About Hunger and Homelessness

More than a dozen **Hamline University** students huddled together last Thursday night, learning—at least a bit—about the cold and bleak reality Minnesota homeless people face.

With the help of the Office of Service Learning and Volunteerism, students began to educate themselves and their peers about homelessness. Their ultimate goal? Finding ways to help reduce the number of people who live without shelter in the Twin Cities.

While it was about five degrees and windy outside that evening, students braved the cold on Old Main Mall, listening to two experts on homelessness. The first was a Hamline student who spoke about his personal experience as a homeless person. He explained what is like to live on the street or in shelters, while eking out a meager existence on what little work he could find.



The second speaker was Michael Dahl, executive director of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless.

"If I am slurring my words, it's because my lower jaw is freezing up," Dahl said. "Don't think for a minute what you are doing here is justice. This is education."

Dahl further explained the harsh conditions that face homeless people, particularly in Minnesota. He also raised the question of whether the group he spoke to could rally ten students to lobby the state legislature in February with his organization.

Student organizer Peter Kozial, responded, "We could get 100 students to help you lobby." Several other students agreed.

In addition to the Thursday night vigil, students planned several other events in coordination with National Hunger and Homelessness Week. Early in the week, students held a Hunger Banquet and a played a game of "Homelessness Jeopardy." There was also a scavenger hunt, with teams of students searching the neighborhood for shelter donations, and a panel discussion about homelessness and the issues surrounding it.