

## *Wheelchair Friendliness Versus Compliance in the Hospitality Industry*

### Summary

The case begins with a statistical introduction as to the number of Americans who have a disability, with a specific focus on wheelchair users. The function of the United States Access Board and its relationship to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is introduced, followed by the amendments proposed in 2008, 2010, and 2012 specific to hospitality businesses. A global perspective of wheelchair users and their annual disposable income is presented, which leads into a discussion on ADA compliance versus friendliness and the potential among hospitality business owners and operators to meet and exceed the service needs of this increasingly expanding global population.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is presented to describe the fundamental right of all humans, which allows for total control of our lives, decision-making capabilities, and assimilation into a community. A new paradigm of disability is introduced, which contrasts a previous definition and perspective of what it means to have a disability. The definition proposed by the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) describes a disability in terms of an interaction between an individual and his or her environment, rather than the perceived “impairments” of an individual. This shift toward inclusion for all travelers has implications on service providers and their future business growth.

The website “wheelchairjimmy.com” is used as a platform to contextualize ADA regulations with the most common concerns of wheelchair travelers. Proprietary accessibility ratings are discussed and used as examples across several criteria for restaurant and hotel wheelchair friendliness. Finally, a project is introduced, which relates to wheelchairjimmy.com.

### Target Audience

This case is appropriate for undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of hospitality management courses. In the ADA context, this case study could be utilized in several management courses with a particular focus on Facilities, Guest Services, Human Resources, Restaurant Operations, and Lodging.

### Teaching Objectives & Learning Outcomes

This case study aims to (1) generate classroom discussions about ADA regulations and (2) to discern the differences between wheelchair friendliness versus compliance in the hospitality industry. These teaching objectives will be measured by the following learning outcomes.

Upon completing the assigned readings, classroom discussions, and project associated with this case, students should be able to:

- Analyze the costs related to ADA compliance within a hospitality organization.

- Categorize hospitality establishments as non-compliant, compliant, or friendly in terms of wheelchair accessibility.
- Recommend structural, design, and/or operational modifications of a hospitality establishment for full compliance and/or friendly access of wheelchair guests.

### Theoretical Perspectives

This case is underpinned by two related theoretical perspectives utilized to provide a psycho-social context challenging students’ current perceptions of guests in wheelchairs, and the important role innovative hospitality organizations can play in exceeding guests’ service expectations. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is concerned with human motivation as it applies to social development and well-being. The SDT framework provides a perspective for understanding better the importance of intrinsic motivation for those persons with a disability and how practices and structures have the potential to enhance, rather than diminish, mobility.

The past three decades of studies supported by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) has revealed the potential for a new paradigm of disability. The current paradigm of thought on disability is focused on the impairment of the individual, which has implications on a person’s capabilities to function in his or her environment. In contrast, the new proposed paradigm of disability by the NIDRR shifts the focus to the interaction between an individual and his or her environment. This shift has implications for both research and practice.

### Lesson Plan

#### *Pre-Class Preparation*

This case study may either be used on its own, or as part of a supplemental activity within an ADA-related hospitality module. Prior to instruction, students should have access to the links provided in the “Preparation” section. Students should also be encouraged to conduct some Internet-based research on their own regarding ADA compliance in the hospitality industry.

#### *In-Class Presentation*

Depending on the preference and time allotment of the instructor, this case may be presented in one or two class meetings. At the discretion of the instructor, he or she may either assign the case narrative as a reading assignment along with the pre-class preparation work, or present the case as a lecture, guided by the narrative. If presented as a lecture, the instructor should assign the case as a follow-up reading assignment and require students to prepare the discussion questions on an individual basis.

### Small Group Discussions

Thirty minutes should be allotted for students to discuss in small groups their individually prepared answers to the case discussion questions. Another 15-20 minutes should be used for group leaders to share their answers with the class, allowing for the instructor to weave in pertinent examples of ADA challenges in the hospitality industry (see ADA lawsuit links provided). The remaining time in the class (at least 20 minutes) should be utilized to discuss the ADA project and grading procedures. If taught in mixed mode, it is recommended to organize the project within a learning management system (i.e. Blackboard, Webcourses, Moodle, etc.), creating content pages and assignment submission portals for each of the four parts of the project.

### The Project

It is recommended to present this case study in the early stages of a course, in parallel to a lesson or module on ADA. The student deliverables, particularly Part Three: the 2-3-minute video, are of higher quality if each preceding part of the project (Parts One and Two) is spaced apart and graded individually. Instructor feedback on Parts One and Two helps students to focus on those areas most germane to the course learning objectives.

**Part One: Create a list and categorize ADA-related criteria.** The purpose of Part One of the project is to ensure that students are well acquainted with the current ADA criteria regarding hospitality organizations. While formal ADA government websites provide specific structural and design criteria, other blogs and disability travel websites also provide context and can demonstrate the difference between compliance and friendliness in terms of meeting and exceeding ADA specifications. Links to [wheelchairjimmy.com](http://wheelchairjimmy.com) and [wheelchairtravel.org](http://wheelchairtravel.org) offer in-depth travel information, which includes references to other disability travel blogs: <https://wheelchairtravel.org/resources/travel-blogs/>. These are rich resources of disability travel information, compared with the more generalized social media sources such as those found on TripAdvisor, Priceline, Expedia, etc.

Students should create a table with at least 10 ADA-based criteria in the hospitality industry, and categorize the criteria in terms of compliance vs. friendliness. For those criteria deemed “compliant”, students should make suggestions as to how these could be more user-friendly (see table below as an example). Based on the totality of the 3-part project,

Part One could be worth 20% out of a 100-point scale.

**Part Two: Visit and evaluate an establishment.** Part Two, as a precursor to Part Three, is an essential step in ensuring that students will successfully identify and engage a hospitality establishment to participate in a potential video. A preliminary visit and tour of a hotel or restaurant of the students’ choosing will allow both the students and the instructor to determine the viability of the students’ choice of venue. In addition, the report required in Part Two will allow students to test the accuracy of their ADA wheelchair compliance checklist from Part One. Part Two of the project could be worth 30% out of a 100-point scale.

**Part Three: Create a 2-3-minute video with a partner, which includes the use of a wheelchair.** Part Three of the project is best allocated in groups of two. Students may pair up in the class and based on their findings from Part Two of the project, they could determine which venue out of two would be most likely to agree to an informal wheelchair accessibility audit. If the instructor decides to allow students to self-select a venue, a formal written letter on institutional letterhead, accompanied by a brief orientation as to how best to solicit business managers, will adequately prepare students to engage industry managers. If the instructor prefers to assign the venues for the video portion of the project, he or she must organize access to those businesses in advance of the course presentation.

Based on prior use of this case study project, maximum impact as a result of participating in this project is dependent on the use of an actual wheelchair during the filming of the short video. While motorized scooters have become increasingly available, wheelchairs remain the most preferred among disabled users and therefore, contain challenges specific to their use. Many hotels have wheelchairs available for guests. In the absence of these, it is recommended to contact a local wheelchair rental business to loan 2-3 wheelchairs for the duration of the project, or perhaps borrow 2-3 wheelchairs from the institution. Careful solicitation of local partners is key to assuring that future classes will be able to participate in this case study project over the long term.

As a guide to desirable information within the video, students may be directed to the [wheelchairjimmy.com](http://wheelchairjimmy.com) website for a multitude of wheelchair travel videos from across the United States, featuring both chain and privately-owned restaurants and hotels. It is recommended that the instructor show a few of these videos during class time, or in the online learning environment. An example of a potential

ADA Criteria	Facility Type	Compliant/Friendly	Suggestions to Increase Friendliness
Bed height	Hotel	No ADA criteria	Suggested bed height is 20-23” with reference to a 19” wheelchair seat. Suggest 19” for easy transfer from chair to bed. ( <a href="https://dredf.org/anprm/beds-in-accessible-sleeping-rooms.shtml">https://dredf.org/anprm/beds-in-accessible-sleeping-rooms.shtml</a> )
Bar stool height	Restaurant	No ADA criteria	Suggest accessible low tables in the bar so chairs can roll up; table height is mandated at 28-32” by ADA. ( <a href="https://www.katom.com/cat/furniture/dining-room-ada-compliant.html">https://www.katom.com/cat/furniture/dining-room-ada-compliant.html</a> )

rubric is included in the Appendix and this portion of the project could be worth 40% out of a 100-point scale.

**Part Four: Reflection activity.** Critical to deep learning in service-related projects of this nature, is the reflection component. Not only do reflections demonstrate students' contextualization of the learning objectives, but they also inform instructors as to which components of the assignment performed best, and which might need re-evaluation. Depending on the nature of the course, the mode (face-to-face, mixed mode, or full online), and the subject area, modifications can be made in subsequent assigned projects to better engage learners. This part of the project could be valued at 10% out of a 100-point scale.

## Analysis of Discussion Questions

*Given the updates to the ADA for hospitality facilities over the years, what are the typical costs for compliance of an exterior entrance ramp, an interior ramp, a swimming pool chair lift, and bathroom modifications? What are the differences in costs between an existing building and new construction?*

Potential responses to this question will vary according to the age, type of operation, location, and design of a hospitality facility. Basic internet searches will reveal the following costs: exterior and interior entrance ramps, approximately US\$200-\$220 per linear foot or US\$4,800 to US\$5,280 for a 24 ft long ramp (<http://www.adawheelchairramps.com/wheelchair-ramps/ada-guidelines.aspx>); swimming pool chair lift, from US\$1,200 to US\$4,000 per lift (<http://www.spinlife.com/category.cfm?categoryID=294>); and bathroom modifications, at US\$1,500 to US\$10,000 (<http://www.homeadvisor.com/cost/mental-safety/remodel-for-disability-accommodation/>).

These costs serve only as a rough estimate, where commercial construction costs and building age (retrofit versus new construction) will determine fluctuations in both product and installation costs. While retrofitting costs can pose financial burdens on small businesses, the intention of the ADA statutes is to comply with the standards as is feasible, and over time (<https://www.ada.gov/reachingout/lesson33.htm>).

*How can a hospitality business operator/firm calculate the return on investment (ROI) of an ADA compliance cost?*

While it is challenging to analyze ROI for ADA compliance costs, students should consider the growing population of travelers who use wheelchairs and assisted walkers in responding to this question. ROI can also be determined according to corporate social responsibility, marketing to the growing population (and their traveling companions) who require wheelchairs and/or motorized scooters and walkers, compliance with the law, and the desire to improve accessibility for all people.

*What are both the tangible and intangible consequences in your region for non-compliance of mandated ADA statutes in the hospitality industry?*

Tangible consequences for non-compliance of the ADA includes potential lawsuits, fines, and federal intervention (<http://www.evanterry.com/img.asp?dl=1&t=2&id=24421>). Intangible consequences include negative publicity, resulting in the potential loss of revenues from a growing segment of travelers, including retirees and their families (<http://www.docsoft.com/Resources/Studies/Whitepapers/ComplianceROI.pdf>). Students should discuss a variety of positions on compliance versus non-compliance including frivolous lawsuits, potential closure of small hospitality businesses, and other industry-related challenges.

The instructor is encouraged to utilize the following ADA hospitality lawsuits demonstrating a variety of perspectives on compliance and associated costs:

- Frivolous lawsuits: <http://www.abcactionnews.com/longform/crippled-florida-businesses-seek-help-over-serial-americans-with-disabilities-act-suers> and <https://www.city-journal.org/html/ada-shakedown-racket-12494.html>
- Hospitality website access : <http://www.hotelmanagement.net/legal/new-lawsuits-raise-concern-over-online-ada-compliance>
- Costs associated with "Drive-By" lawsuits: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-americans-with-disabilities-act-lawsuits-anderson-cooper/>
- "Twenty Years of ADA Enforcement, Twenty Significant Cases": [https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/45th/ada20/ada\\_cases.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/45th/ada20/ada_cases.cfm)
- Pertaining to pool lifts: <https://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2016/02/04/hotels-bars-restaurants-face-waves-of-ada.html>
- ADA compliance for hotel employees: <https://simplyaccessible.com/article/internal-systems/>

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**Appendix**

**Sample Grading Rubric for Wheelchair Video**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exemplary 4 pts</b>	<b>Proficient 3 pts</b>	<b>Developing 2 pts</b>	<b>Beginning 1 pt</b>
ADA Wheelchair Content	Strong message. Covers topic completely and in depth.	Message is clearly communicated. Includes essential information.	Message is vaguely communicated. Includes some essential information with some facts.	Message is unclear. Includes little essential information and one or two facts.
Video Organization	Topic is thoroughly and thoughtfully discussed. Well-structured components extending beyond an introduction, a middle and an ending.	Topic is discussed. Structured with an introduction, a middle, and a clear ending.	Topic is discussed with an intact introduction and ending.	Video jumps around without a clear structure.
Video Quality	Images or video are well composed and clearly visible.	Images or video are composed and visible.	Images or video are mostly visible.	Images or video are difficult to discern.
Audio Quality	Clear delivery enhanced with music or other sound effects.	Clear and consistent.	Mostly clear, with some audio difficult to interpret.	50% or more of the audio unintelligible.