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## Accessibility at Pepperdine: A Persuasive Campaign

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## **Accessibility at Pepperdine: A Persuasive Campaign**

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### **Abstract**

Through our persuasive campaign, we hope to have Pepperdine commit to doing more than the bare minimum for legal ADA compliance and genuine care for students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities through a number of measures. We aim for action in the form of physical alterations to campus, including more ramps, uniform staircases, elevators in all housing, and increased accessible parking. Furthermore, our campaign plans to affect a long-term change to campus culture and decision-making. Rather than view accessibility as an additional, peripheral standard to meet, we hope to persuade Pepperdine's leadership to make it a primary concern guiding decisions for years to come. This includes alternative classwork and programming, informing people of accessible routes on campus during tours and orientations, and listening more carefully to the voices of those with disabilities in our campus community as they raise concerns and express needs.

### **Keywords**

accessibility, persuasion, elaboration likelihood model, ADA compliance

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Although technically compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Pepperdine has a fraught history of disability rights and accessibility practices. After March of 2022's Disability Awareness Week, the campus was buzzing with criticism and concern over the state of accessibility on campus. In particular, March 17th's Solidarity Day, which challenged students to use only accessible routes to get around campus, led to an uproar over the impracticality and inconvenience of

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Pepperdine's accommodations (Wilt, 2022). However, this is hardly a new issue. Graphic articles dating to 2019 addressed how Pepperdine's so-called ADA "compliance" was failing the nearly two hundred students with disabilities registered through the Office of Accessibility (Iturralde, 2019). Although the systems of accessibility to meet the bare minimum legal requirements exist, they often are not functional or active, and the campus community has called for more than the bare minimum regardless.

The ADA was passed in 1990, and the American with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) was signed into law in 2009, altering the ADA. These laws were implemented to "prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life" (ADA National Network). Pepperdine falls under Title III, which regulates public accommodations. It states, "This title sets the minimum standards of accessibility for alternations and construction of new facilities... This title directs businesses to make 'reasonable modifications' to their usual ways of doing things when serving people with disabilities" (ADA National Network). The standards set by the ADA are acknowledged as minimal and fail to center the perspectives of individuals with disabilities. While they prevent blatant neglect, meeting these standards does not equate to genuine care.

While Pepperdine's accessibility measures technically meet the requirements of the law, further action is needed to truly serve the students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. There have been reports of service vehicles parking in accessible spots, door buttons not working properly, lack of accessible routes, and accommodations being forgotten or not actively implemented (Sullivan, 2020). Even if Pepperdine's accessibility measures worked perfectly, campus community members with disabilities would still face unnecessary severe challenges. Our social action campaign aims to center the perspectives of these individuals to make Pepperdine a *truly* accessible space.

### **The Objective of the Accessibility at Pepperdine Campaign**

Through our campaign, we hope to have Pepperdine commit to doing more than the bare minimum for legal ADA compliance and genuine care for students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities through several measures. We aim for action in the form of physical alterations to campus, including more ramps, uniform staircases, elevators in all housing, and increased accessible parking. Furthermore, our campaign plans to affect a long-term change to campus culture and decision-making. Rather than view accessibility as an additional, peripheral standard to meet, we hope to persuade Pepperdine's leadership to make it a primary concern guiding decisions for years to come. This includes alternative classwork and programming, informing people of accessible routes on campus during tours and orientations, and listening more carefully to the voices of those with disabilities in our campus community as they raise concerns and express needs.

### **Theoretical Framework and Theme**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model provides a theoretical framework effective in persuading the general Pepperdine population and decision-making faculty toward funding and implementing a more accessible campus. Some will be influenced by the **central route** of persuasion—the facts, figures, and logic persuading us toward this cause. However, this requires intrinsic motivation, such as personal relevance or need for understanding. In the case of someone who is not persuaded by the central route, the argument rests on the **peripheral route** of persuasion—the extraneous cues such as speaker attractiveness, music, or graphics, to motivate to dive into the central route (Borchers, 2021).

In the context of our persuasive campaign, there is compelling evidence provided by the central route of persuasion. One key persuasive tactic within this movement is an emotional appeal, or emphasizing key concepts like inclusivity and increased well-being for disabled individuals is vital. As we are in an increasingly visual culture, we must rely heavily on the peripheral route. Using

keywords and streamlined information allows even neutral parties to engage with the message rather than tune it out due to clutter (Borchers, 2021). Additionally, the use of bright colors and trendy design styles, in line with popular Instagram marketing of the moment, will draw in viewers from our target audience who may be less motivated to interact with the message solely.

### Target Audience of Accessibility at Pep

For a Pepperdine-specific campaign, several influential groups require different methods of persuasion. One such group is the student body. Initial change should come from supportive students, such as students with disabilities and allies, in the form of activation. By establishing the first step, preexisting supporters can rally behind, such as petitioning the Student Government Association and providing easily repostable social media graphics, preexisting supporters can help spread the word. Their work would increase the issue's visibility, bringing it to the attention of neutral parties, which

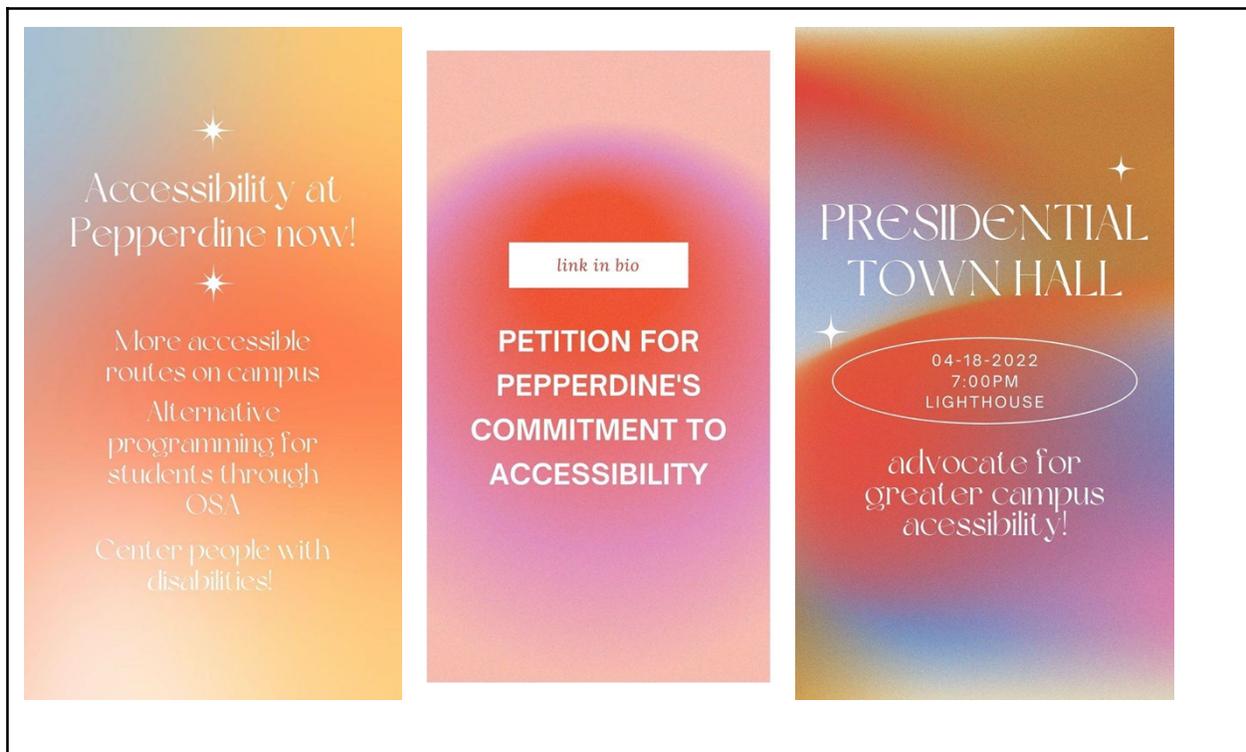


Figure 1.1-1.3: Social media graphics supporters can share, formatted for Instagram stories.

may be persuaded by our peripheral route cues to join the cause. A neutral student is uninformed or uninvolved with this movement and has the potential to become a supporter or an opponent.

Oppositional students are those who would not be in favor of changes to campus, either due to the inconvenience of construction, economic reasons, either implicit or explicit ableism, and/or other reasons. To neutralize this party, there must be a powerfully compelling central route, as those opposed altogether may completely shut out other persuasive cues. For those who may be concerned about construction, we can not only try to get most construction done over the summer when students are largely off-campus but quiet hours and locations across campus to sleep and study can also be incorporated into the plan. To the best of our ability, we can promise to relocate funds to this project rather than requesting a tuition increase. As for those who may be opposed to an increased presence of disabled individuals on campus, utilizing pathos and emotional appeal can humanize this stigmatized group (Augusto & McGraw, 1990).

Another group that overlaps with the general student body is the Student Government Association (SGA). This student body is an important group to target as they provide a communication channel between the general student body and the administration. Historically, SGA has been able to pass resolutions and influence policy in various ways, including installing water bottle stations across campus (Kunawaradisai, 2019). Furthermore, their lower power distance and close peer connections with the greater student body allow more accessible communication and understanding. This group can neutralize faculty or board directors who may be in opposition due to their closer personal connection with SGA.

### **Platforms and Timing for Accessibility at Pep**

Regarding student organizing, social media is the most effective and viable option for platforming a message. As research has shown consistently in the past several years, social media has

allowed the proliferation of stories from marginalized groups to move to the forefront (Smith et al., 2020). While social media algorithms tend to highlight content in line with one's preexisting beliefs, connections with peers and acquaintances can bring visibility to content that may not be as algorithmically relevant to an individual (Thorson et al., 2019).

Several significant events—the Russia and Ukraine conflict being one—gained prominence in cultural consciousness, especially in younger generations, through exposure to repeated Instagram posts and infographics concerning the matter. Creating graphics highlighting specific changes requested from Pepperdine and providing reasoning as to why further accessibility is necessary is essential to mobilize students and increase awareness campus-wide. In line with the Elaboration Likelihood model discussed earlier, an attractive or eye-catching graphic can function as the peripheral route toward the actual content of the message.

The next steps in our campaign are petitioning the Board of Directors to make a commitment to accessibility and to hold a town hall with President Jim Gash and other faculty to express the importance of these measures and provide specific requests. Research proves that petitions can effectively mobilize support and create a shared group identity (Matthews, 2021). However, face-to-face interaction with leaders is proven to be more effective, as online petitions can tend to depersonalize the impact of the issue (Koenig & McLaughlin, 2018). Personal testimony, as a part of this town hall, can emphasize urgency and foster empathy among leaders (Rizzo Parse, 2008).

### **Measures of Campaign Success**

To measure the success of our campaign, we will use the criteria of Pepperdine policy and the implementation of accessibility measures. The campaign will be considered successful when Pepperdine leadership issues a statement of commitment to accessibility for disabled individuals and expressly acknowledges our movement's message in the process. We hope to be invited to the table

to address the issues we are raising and collaboratively plan steps forward, similar to how Pepperdine-Disability-Rights Activist Mackenzie Maden was recognized by the administration and invited into conversation with President Gash and DPS (Sullivan, 2020).

Furthermore, to ensure that their statement was not solely for public appearance, another marker of success will be the initiation of tangible accessibility measures, for example, beginning construction on ramps around campus. Measuring the campaign's success will be a long-standing, ongoing process in which we ensure Pepperdine leadership is consistently moving forward with concrete measures and centering concerns of accessibility in their decision-making process.

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