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Elizabeth Pendo

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# A Service Learning Project: Disability, Access and Health Care

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Elizabeth Pendo  
Saint Louis University - School of Law

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## **Abstract**

Last summer, I was thinking about a public service project for my disability discrimination law course. I teach the course in fall, and try to incorporate a project each year. At the same time, I was working on a project looking at barriers to health care for people with disabilities. Some of the barriers are well known, such as lower average incomes, disproportionate poverty, and issues with insurance coverage, to name just a few. I was looking at barriers of a different type, however: those posed by physically inaccessible facilities and equipment. This was a new area for me. Like many health law professors, I had focused on the more familiar issues of disability in employment, insurance coverage, and medical decision-making. I needed to learn more about accessibility requirements and the removal of architectural barriers under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and how these apply to the delivery of health care.

I wanted a project that would reflect and reinforce knowledge of the doctrinal issues surrounding the requirements of physical access and barrier removal under the ADA. I also wanted students to develop lawyering and advocacy skills, such as working in teams, consulting effectively with experts, gathering evidence and documenting a case, problem-solving through local and administrative processes, framing effective written requests, and making connections in the community. I hoped it would provide a meaningful context for exploring issues and tensions underlying disability law and the disability rights movement. People with disabilities have experienced a history of thoughtlessness and indifference by non-disabled people. A project could provide an opportunity for students to notice and address an issue of importance to people with disabilities, and to foster a sense of engagement and responsibility central to civic professionalism. And, yes, I wanted those curbs cut. Thanks to the enthusiasm of my students and the support of several people in the community, the project exceeded my expectations on almost every level.

In this "Teaching Health Law" column for the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, I describe the project - including its goals, design, process, and outcomes - as well as its application to health care access issues.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Health Law, Disability, ADA, Civil Rights, Public Right-of-Way, Access, Service Learning, Public Service

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