

ACUTA ALERT:

FCC RELEASES RULES TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Colleges and Universities Required to Comply as Service Providers

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has released an extensive set of rules to ensure that telecommunications equipment and services are accessible to persons with disabilities. These rules were adopted to implement Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Colleges and universities are required to comply with the rules, as aggregators of telecommunications services. The rules apply to a broad range of telecommunications products and services such as telephones, cell phones, pagers, local and long distance service, call-waiting, voice mail, and operator services. Web-based services are not covered by these rules.

Under these new rules, you as a service provider must do all that is readily achievable to make telecom services accessible. Equipment manufacturers must do the same in designing telecom equipment. "Readily achievable" was defined by the FCC representative speaking at ACUTA's Winter Seminar last week as that which can be accomplished without much difficulty or expense, considering the resources, cost, and the nature of the action that must be taken.

ACUTA recommends that Telecommunications professionals become familiar with the rules and how they will apply to your campus. More information and a copy of the rules are available on the FCC's Disabilities Issues Task Force Web page, at <http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/section255.html>. We recommend you review the information on the "Section 255 Report and Order (R&O), released September 29, 1999." We would also recommend that you involve your institution's Americans with Disabilities Act compliance office in reviewing this material, and in determining any compliance activities that must be undertaken by your campus. We also recommend that you consider involving any disability organizations or advocacy groups on campus to seek their input regarding access to telecommunications equipment and services.

Institutions Required to Designate a Contact Person or Office

The FCC rules require all service providers and equipment manufacturers to designate an agent, to ensure the manufacturer's or service provider's prompt receipt and handling of accessibility concerns raised by consumers or Commission staff. This agent may be either an individual or an office with this responsibility.

The contact information must, at a minimum, include the name of the person or office, telephone number (voice and TTY), fax number and both mailing and e-mail addresses. The representative or agent should have the means available to convert materials distributed and received into accessible formats.

You must file this information by letter by March 1, 2000 with the Secretary of the FCC at the following address:

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street SW, Room TW-B204
Washington DC 20554

ACUTA Plans Audio Conference on Section 255 Rules

Watch your e-mail for an announcement of an upcoming [ACUTA Audio Conference](#) to help you comply with the rules on accessibility of telecommunications equipment and services. The audio conference will be announced shortly after FCC procedures have been finalized sufficiently to provide details you will need in order to meet the requirements in these rules for service providers.

Resources

FCC Disabilities Issues Task Force Home Page: <http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro>

FCC Info on Section 255 Rules: <http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/section255.html>

US Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board):

<http://www.access-board.gov>

Access Board Guidelines for Telecommunications Act Accessibility: <http://www.access-board.gov/telecomm/html/telfin12.htm>

Text of Telecom Act of 1996 (containing text of Section 255):

<http://www.fcc.gov/Reports/tcom1996.txt>

ACUTA Legislative/Regulatory Affairs Committee