Engineer Seeks To Educate FCC, Youth

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For more than 15 years, Ted Rappaport has been teaching young radio engineering hopefuls at Virginia Tech and, most recently, the University of Texas.

Now he's doing the same thing for the commissioners and staff at the FCC as a member of the commission's Technological Advisory Council.

Rappaport, who joined the UT engineering department in 2002 and founded its Wireless Networking and Communications Group, was named to the FCC council earlier this year. He also recently was named to a National Academy of Sciences committee studying telecommunications research.

The TAC is made up of technical experts from manufacturing, academia, service providers and researchers. Its goal is to provide technical advice to the FCC and its staff.

"The council is an amazing group," Rappaport says. "I pinched myself when they asked me to be on the council."

The professor, who received his bachelor's, master's and doctorate at Purdue University, says he thinks he can provide a real-world as well as academic point of view on the council. He's started two wireless companies—a software radio equipment firm called TSR Technologies Inc. in 1989, which he later sold, and Wireless Valley Communications Inc. in 1995. The latter company, of which he is chairman and CEO, is widely known for its software products for the design, measurement and management of in-building and campus networks.

Rappaport says he will offer technical advice to the FCC, and not opinions, but that he thinks the FCC has some opportunities to foster wireless telecommunications.

"The FCC," he says, "will be a big part of helping provide the spectrum and incentives that spur the U.S. telecom industry."

He says he would like to see the FCC offer "incentives to modem makers to develop efficient and robust technologies. You can get better use of spectrum when technology exploits the capabilities of modern signal processing."

Rappaport is committed to education at all levels, but one of his lifelong goals is to convey his excitement about engineering to young people.

"There is a need to teach engineers," he says. "More and more we have to get young people excited about being engineers. Engineers in our society have the respect, but I don't think they are ... seen as heroes. One of my career goals is to help create opportunities and excite students to develop the next (technological) revolution. I am very optimistic, but it is a tough job to figure out how to get kids excited."