

Implied Mandates: Best Practices

Based on our relationships with hundreds of institutions across the country, we believe that there are a number of tactics that are proven to enhance compliance rates within an implied mandate framework.

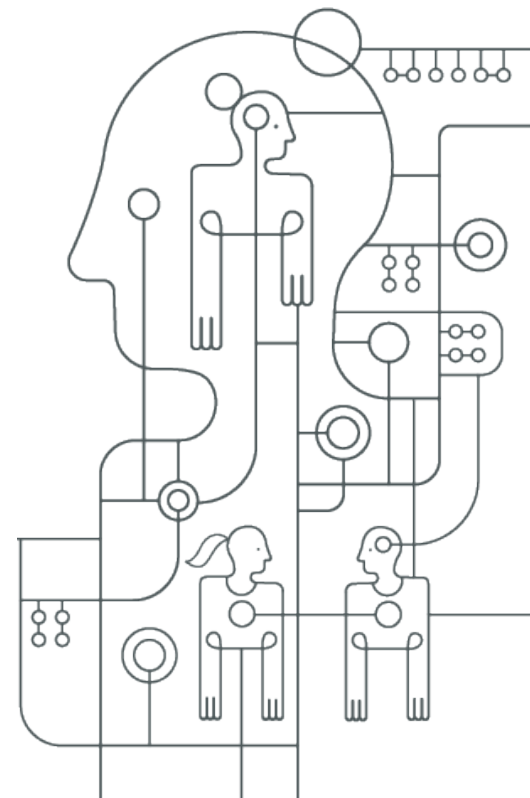
Background Regarding Implied Mandates

- With an Implied Mandate, institutions use specific language to set a strong expectation that their participants will complete the course, but in order to avoid negative reinforcement, most do not communicate a formal consequence initially.
- A “consequence” is communicated only to individuals who do not complete the course by the stated deadline. Consequences can be anything that requires minimal administrative action but conveys an institutional commitment to the expectation of completion.
- These appear to work well with institutions that choose a pre-matriculation implementation for students, as very few students question the “expectation” of an institution prior to the third or fourth week of the semester.

Proven Practices for Implementation

1. Employ Direct and Specific Language to Set Expectations

- **Use very specific language.** Phrases such as “You are expected to complete,” are more likely to be successful than “We would like you to complete,” or “We hope that you will complete.”
- **Set an effective tone.** We recommend requesting participation in a tone that conveys institutional commitment to student/employee engagement and academic success. Participants are more responsive and committed to fully participating in the program(s) when the institution or organization conveys a sense of concern for and partnership with target population. This approach may be perceived by students/employees as less confrontational and more collegial. Some statements that may be useful



include:

"We recognize that you will be faced with difficult decisions about how to balance academic success with social life..."

"We understand that you may be faced with difficult situations in your interactions with students as well as fellow faculty and staff members..."

"Balancing social life with academic life requires a full partnership between students, faculty, and staff. To that end, [organization/college] seeks to fulfill its commitment to that relationship by asking all first year students to complete [course]."

- **Provide clear directions and expectations to students, faculty and staff.** Participants will benefit from clearly communicated, step-by-step, accurate instructions. Institutions should describe their expectations, the benefits of participation, and, if appropriate, the range of possible consequences for lack of participation.

2. Engage Broad Institutional Support

- By engaging support from partners across the institution, you will be able to communicate expectations and place emphasis on the appreciation of participants' efforts. In addition, it is essential to build and maintain open lines of communication with your partners in Student Affairs, Admissions, Human Resources, and Information Technology, among others. All of these relationships can help support your goals.

3. Ensure Strong Follow-up

- It is essential to provide follow-up communication to participants to ensure completion of Part 2. For students, this can often be done with the assistance of residence life staff, orientation staff, or instructors of first-year seminars.
- Planning for participants who do not meet the deadline. No matter what type of mandate you choose, it is crucial to have a plan for those students/employees who do not meet the deadlines and for which mandates must be enforced. Although you may not communicate the consequence initially, there should be a process in place to address individuals who do not participate. Otherwise, continuing students/employees may pass on to new students/employees that "nothing happened" happened when they did not complete the program. This may become more problematic as the years go on.

To do this:

- » Identify the subset of individuals in this situation
- » Discuss ways to address non-compliant students/employees
- » Notify the non-compliant student/employees in advance of the deadline (registration date, housing lottery date, etc.)
- Additional follow-up strategies. The follow-up strategies listed below have proven successful at increasing participation at other partner institutions that use an implied mandate. These strategies usually require minimal administrative action:

- » *Informing students their judicial file “has been flagged” – this can mean anything from an actual letter being placed in a file, to all judicial officers receiving a list of students who haven’t completed. For faculty and staff, a similar action can be completed for their employee file. Again, the idea is that it requires little work for the administration but sends a very clear message regarding the institution’s expectations.*
- » A variation of the above - let students/employees who haven’t completed know that non-completion is the equivalent of a policy violation and that any violation from this point on will be considered their second.
- » Letter to parents (for student courses). This works especially well for institutions that have a parental notification policy already in place. If not, this can be a bit trickier.

Additional Thought for Consideration

As mentioned above, many of our partner institutions find, after several years of utilizing an implied mandate that they will be more successful transitioning to a mandate with consequences because “word gets out” at the institution that not completing the program is acceptable. We encourage you to consider this option and would be happy to help you with future planning if you decide to pursue this path.