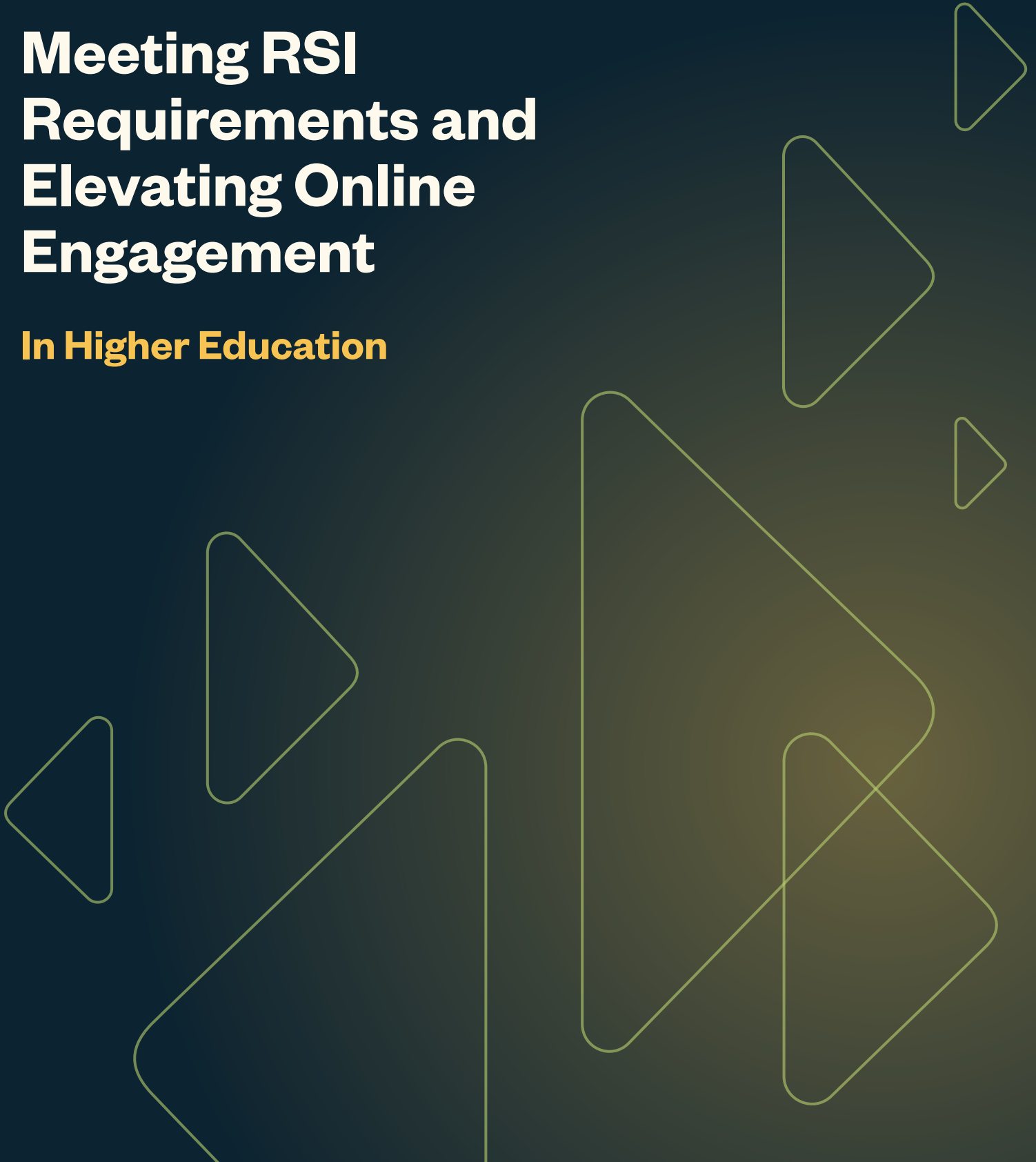engageli

Meeting RSI Requirements and Elevating Online Engagement

In Higher Education

engageli

In the United States, student engagement is no longer just an educational goal; it's a regulatory necessity. Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is now a required component of accredited online programs, mandated by the U.S. Department of Education and enforced as a condition for access to federal financial aid.

For colleges and universities, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity: how can institutions meet RSI requirements while also improving student outcomes and sustaining enrollment?

The challenge: meeting RSI requirements in online learning

Many institutions struggle to deliver, track, and document RSI across all courses, especially at scale.

RSI compliance requires instructors to maintain frequent, instructor-initiated, meaningful interactions with students in both synchronous and asynchronous courses. These standards are defined under 34 C.F.R. §600.2 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and are now a critical component of maintaining accreditation and federal funding eligibility.

Institutions that fail to meet RSI requirements face real consequences, including:

• Loss of federal financial aid eligibility

• Accreditation risks

• Decreased student satisfaction and retention

While the intent behind RSI is to improve educational quality, compliance can be labor-intensive and costly. Many institutions struggle to deliver, track, and document RSI across all courses, especially at scale.

The financial stakes of non-compliance

Failing to meet RSI guidelines has broad implications for colleges and universities, affecting federal funding, accreditation standing, and day-to-day operations. Below, we break down the key financial and operational risks that institutions face when they fall short of federal RSI standards.

Federal aid risk

Institutions that do not demonstrate RSI may have their online programs reclassified as correspondence education, making them ineligible for Title IV federal financial aid. This can result in tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars in funding losses.

For example, a federal audit of one college recommended the institution **repay $42 million in aid due to RSI deficiencies**. In a more extreme case, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Inspector General (OIG) concluded that a different university had failed to provide RSI in a majority of sampled courses and recommended a **$713 million clawback in federal aid**.

While both organizations ultimately avoided repayment, the cases served as a wake-up call for institutions across the country. Today, the rules around RSI are clearly defined in 34 C.F.R. §600.2, and the Department has made it clear that **non-compliant institutions can face major financial liabilities**.

Accreditation issues

RSI compliance is not just a federal funding issue; it's also tied to accreditation standards. Accrediting bodies now review online course quality through the lens of RSI, with deficiencies potentially triggering warnings, probation, or even loss of accreditation. This creates a domino effect: if accreditation is lost, **institutions become ineligible for all federal financial aid under Title IV**.

During the pandemic, accreditors granted some leeway for remote instruction, but those exceptions have expired. As of 2021, all institutions are expected to meet full RSI compliance or risk sanctions from both regulators and accrediting agencies. In an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, accreditation jeopardy not only disrupts enrollment and operations; it damages institutional reputation and credibility.

Increased workload

Implementing and documenting RSI across online courses requires significant time and resource investment. One college projected **$58,500 in one-time compensation** just for faculty completing RSI rubrics, alongside the need for ongoing staff roles to manage tracking, training, and documentation. These demands underscore that RSI compliance, while essential for maintaining accreditation and funding, **can place a substantial burden on institutions without dedicated systems and scalable solutions**.

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Protecting revenue through improved engagement and streamlined compliance

Investing in student engagement and RSI compliance is a strategic move that both protects tuition revenue and reduces operational costs.

When students are more engaged, they're more likely to persist in their programs. This directly translates to stronger retention rates and greater financial stability. Even modest improvements in retention can preserve millions in tuition dollars that would otherwise be lost to attrition.

Institutions also stand to benefit from operational efficiencies. Automating RSI documentation saves faculty time, eases the administrative burden, and minimizes the risk of costly compliance issues. Rather than relying on piecemeal systems or retroactive audits, universities can use integrated tools to ensure RSI is delivered and recorded consistently across courses.

The bottom line: improved retention strengthens revenue, while streamlined compliance processes reduce cost and risk. Institutions that proactively invest in engagement and RSI-ready platforms are better positioned to sustain funding, accreditation, and long-term success.

The engagement platform built for RSI compliance

Engageli's AI-powered learning platform was designed with interaction, engagement, and compliance at its core. Whether learning is live, on-demand, or hybrid, Engageli offers purpose-built tools that support every pillar of RSI.

Instructor-Initiated Interaction	Regular and Predictable Engagement	Substantive, Course-Focused Content
• Host live discussions, video office hours, and polls • Use private tables for one-on-one check-ins and coaching • Trigger asynchronous Q&A threads and feedback loops	• Schedule recurring sessions and interactive touchpoints • Use auto-tracked analytics to document attendance and participation • Monitor and improve instructor-student interaction frequency	• Deliver guided study sessions and assignment feedback • Add video clips, real-time questions, and collaborative documents • Enable small-group collaboration tied to learning outcomes

Real-world results with Engageli

Institutions using Engageli see measurable improvements in engagement, academic success, and instructional efficiency:

- Students taught with Engageli's active learning approach are **16 times more engaged**
- Courses using Engageli report **54% higher test scores** and stronger long-term knowledge retention
- One university found that students using Engageli were **twice as likely to earn an A** compared to those using traditional platforms

These outcomes align directly with what RSI aims to achieve: greater interaction, improved learning outcomes, and stronger student-instructor connections.

A smarter, more scalable approach to RSI compliance

By integrating RSI-aligned tools and automating key tracking functions, Engageli helps institutions reduce faculty burden while delivering better learning experiences.

With Engageli, institutions gain:

- Built-in documentation of instructor-student interaction for federal audits and accreditation reviews
- Real-time insights into participation, attendance, and engagement
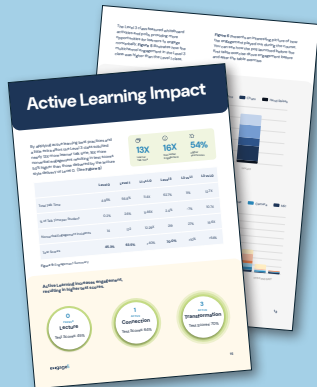- A flexible environment that supports both synchronous and asynchronous learning

Investing in engagement and compliance is a strategic imperative

RSI isn't just a compliance box to check. It's a vital part of maintaining funding, accreditation, and educational quality. Institutions that fall short risk significant financial and reputational consequences, while those that embrace engagement-driven, compliant online learning stand to benefit from stronger student outcomes and long-term stability.

Research shows that student engagement is directly tied to academic success and retention, two of the most important factors in preserving tuition revenue. At the same time, institutions are navigating growing administrative and faculty workloads related to RSI. Without scalable systems in place, compliance can become a drain on resources.

Engageli provides a comprehensive solution that addresses both sides of the equation. With built-in tools for real-time interaction, asynchronous engagement, and automatic tracking, Engageli makes it easier for faculty to meet RSI standards and for students to stay connected and succeed in their programs.

Investing in tools that support engagement and compliance is both a regulatory imperative and a smart financial strategy.

Experience Engageli firsthand

Engageli empowers universities to meet RSI requirements while building inclusive, interactive learning environments that improve outcomes and protect revenue. Schedule a demo today to discover how Engageli can transform student engagement, streamline RSI compliance, and strengthen outcomes at your institution.

Schedule a Demo   **Learn More**