

ON COURSE



Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life



Eighth Edition

SKIP DOWNING

On Course



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Skip Downing



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in College and in Life, Eighth Edition**
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To Carol, my compass

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On Course is intended for college students of any age who want to create success in college and in life. Whether students are taking a student success or first-year seminar course, a writing course, or an “inward-looking” course in psychology, self-exploration, or personal growth, *On Course* is an instruction manual for dramatically improving the quality of their outcomes and experiences. In each chapter, students learn essential study skills; however, that’s just the beginning. Through self-assessments, articles, guided journals, case studies in critical thinking, and inspiring stories from fellow students, *On Course* empowers students with time-proven strategies for creating a great life—academic, personal, and professional. Students learn the techniques that have helped many thousands of students create extraordinary success!

I am grateful that in the years since its first publication in 1996, *On Course* has become a market leader in the crowded field of student success texts. Increasingly, educators are finding (as I have) that empowering students to become active, responsible learners produces significant increases in both student academic success and retention. In addition, the process empowers them to create great things in their personal and professional lives. My goal is to make this new edition of *On Course* even more helpful to the success of students and educators alike.

What’s New in This Edition of *On Course*: Highlights

- **College Smart-Start Guide.** Too many students get off course in their very first week of college. Author Skip Downing polled nearly 2,000 college and university educators, asking them, “What do you recommend that your students do in the first week of college to get off to a good start?” The resulting “Smart-Start Guide” provides students with essential first-week actions recommended by the collective wisdom of this large group of educators. A new activity in the *On Course* Facilitator’s Manual engages students in figuring out which of the actions these instructors thought were the most important. When students follow through on these actions, they will lay an early foundation for their academic success.
- **Understanding the Expectations of College and University Educators.** This essay and related journal entry help students better understand how to succeed in the culture of higher education. In this section, they learn “Eight Key Expectations” and “A Dozen Differences

[*On Course*] is the absolute best approach for a first-year seminar/college success class that there is. The philosophy and textbook are exactly what students need.

Catherine Eloranto, Clinton
Community College

We wanted a curriculum that went beyond study skills to address the foundational needs of first-year college students. *On Course* causes students to examine and reflect on the causes of their successes and setbacks. It challenges students to go beyond the obvious and really delves into their motivations and mindsets. Oh, yeah, and it does a great job addressing study skills too.

Ann Heiny, Armstrong
State University

There's nothing better than *On Course*, as far as I'm concerned.

Lisa Marks, Ozarks
Technical Community
College

On Course has made a huge difference in the students I work with. Most of them see themselves throughout the book, and they are willing to make changes to improve their lives because of the content of *On Course*.

Tanya Stanley,
San Jacinto College

The study skills sections are clear, logically organized and more adaptable as a “how-to” guide than any other texts of similar intent.

Judith Willner, Coppin
State University

between High School and College Culture.” This information helps students quickly understand which behaviors they can continue doing and which they will need to modify, change, or abandon.

- **Tech Tips.** Many websites and apps are available to help students achieve greater success. Most chapters now feature a Tech Tips section that provides suggestions for free websites and apps that can help students employ the soft skills of personal responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, and believing in oneself, as well as hard skills related to effective studying.
- **Discussion about Avoiding Procrastination.** Procrastination is the bane of many students' success. This discussion helps students understand why procrastination is so tempting and offers specific methods for not putting off until tomorrow what they would benefit from doing today. Included in the discussion is research from Dr. Dan Ariely, Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University.
- **A Sign of Maturity.** This discussion offers an explanation about the various kinds of relationships in which people engage: dependent, co-dependent, independent, and interdependent. Advantages and disadvantages of each are explained, and students are urged to use college to develop independence but also to recognize that there are many occasions when choosing interdependence is a true sign of maturity (not to mention improving one's chances of achieving a goal or dream).
- **Increasing Happiness.** This new article and accompanying journal entry explore the emotional intelligence skill of maximizing happiness. Drawn from the scientific research of positive psychologists, students learn a number of choices they can make to increase their happiness. This topic has recently gained much interest on college campuses. For example, when a course in Positive Psychology was first offered at Harvard University, it immediately became the university's most popular course.
- **Toolbox for Active Learners.** Many *On Course* instructors asked that study skills be presented in one section (rather than distributed throughout the book). This edition honors that request. Unlike texts that present a long menu of study options, *On Course* organizes study skills based on the logical learning steps as identified by research on the brain and effective methods for learning. This section begins with a presentation of the CORE Learning Process, the four principles that—consciously or unconsciously—all good learners employ to create deep and lasting learning. Students discover how to use these four principles to learn any subject or skill. Each section of the Toolbox presents effective techniques for one of the study skills covered (reading, taking notes, organizing study materials, rehearsing and memorizing study materials, taking tests, and writing college-level assignments) and ends with an exercise to reinforce the study strategies presented therein.

- **Study Skills Self-Assessment.** In addition to placing all of the study skills in one section, this edition also offers a new Study Skills Self-Assessment. Students can take this self-assessment before learning about study skills and discover areas in which they are weak. At the end of the course, they can retake the assessment to see where they have grown as learners and where they may still need to improve. Students have the option of completing the assessment in either the text or MindTap®.
- **SEVEN NEW “One Student’s Stories.”** A popular feature in earlier editions, these short essays —now numbering 29 in all—are authored by students who used what they learned from *On Course* to improve the quality of their outcomes and experiences in college and in life. Videos of many of the student-authors reading their essays may be viewed in MindTap.
- **Conversation with the Author.** Since the first edition of *On Course* was published more than two decades ago, many students have contacted the author with thoughtful questions. This section includes some of those questions and Skip Downing’s answers.

I think these are very powerful stories. . . . It’s good for students to hear that other students have faced the same struggles that they are going through and they have achieved success.

Kathryn Burk,
Jackson College

What’s New in This Edition of *On Course*: Chapter by Chapter

Chapter 1

- New “College Smart-Start Guide” provides students with 13 actions that are important to getting off to a good start in college; recommendations are the result of a poll of 2,000 college educators.
- At the request of a number of *On Course* instructors, “Money Matters” has been moved to Chapter 1, thus helping students early in the semester to reduce struggles caused by financial difficulties.
- New Journal Entry #2.
- New cartoon in “Understanding the Culture of Higher Education.”
- New “Tech Tips: Money.”
- New article, “Understanding the Expectations of College and University Educators,” including a discussion of Eight Key Expectations and A Dozen Differences between High School and College Culture.
- New article, “Understanding Yourself,” including a section on Ingredients of Success.
- Revised #7 of the Self-Assessment: “Whether I’m happy or not depends mostly on me.”
- Moved article “Develop Self-Acceptance” and Journal 4 to Chapter 8.

On Course is life-changing for my students. I have seen students evolve in ways they never imagined in a matter of a semester thanks to *On Course*. I cannot imagine using another book. No other book encompasses the reflective, introspective, and success attributes that *On Course* does. *On Course* walks students through their journey of self-discovery and allows them to grow into the student they have always wanted to become.

Joselyn Gonzalez,
El Centro College

Anyone who can teach students personal responsibility is high on my list.

Debbie Unsold,
Washington State
Community College

On several occasions, I have had various members of the same family in different semesters of my [*On Course*] class because they value the learning so much that they recommend it to sisters/brothers/children/uncles.

Sandra Lancaster, Grand
Rapids Community College

I love *On Course*, and I use it in my personal life as well as preaching it in all of my classes...I have even used it with the classes that I teach in a women's shelter. The concept of moving from Victim to Creator puts the individual in charge of their life and I love that mindset.

Pat Grissom,
San Jacinto College

Chapter 2

- New *One Student's Story* by Taryn Rossmiller, Boise State University, ID.
- New cartoon in "Making Wise Decisions" section.
- New "Tech Tips: Personal Responsibility."

Chapter 3

- New *One Student's Story* by Brandon Beavers, Highland Community College, KS.
- New "Tech Tips: Self-Motivation."
- New *One Student's Story* by Tina Steen, Chaffey College, CA.

Chapter 4

- Added Weekly Calendar to "Creating a Leak-Proof Self-Management System."
- Repositioned "Time and Culture" section, discussing how cultures differ in their beliefs and attitudes about time and what college culture's expectations are about time.
- New information on avoiding procrastination in the "Developing Self-Discipline" article.
- New "Tech Tips: Self-Management."

Chapter 5

- Added information to "Creating a Support System" on the importance of choosing wisely among various kinds of relationships: dependent, co-dependent, independent, and interdependent.
- Added parable, "The Difference between Heaven and Hell," in the "Creating a Support System" article.
- New *One Student's Story* by Mitch Mull, Asheville-Buncombe Technical and Community College, NC.
- New *One Student's Story* by Teroa Pselio, Windward Community College, HI.
- New "Tech Tips: Interdependence."

Chapter 6

- New "Tech Tips: Self-Awareness."

Chapter 7

- New "Tech Tips: Lifelong Learning."

Chapter 8

- New article, “Increasing Happiness,” presents research from scientific studies within the new field of positive psychology, including both the limits on increasing happiness as well as ways to become more happy.
- New Journal Entry 30 regarding “Increasing Happiness.”
- New “Tech Tips: Emotional Awareness.”
- Moved article, “Develop Self-Acceptance,” and Journal Entry 4 (now Journal Entry 31) here from Chapter 1.

Chapter 9

- Revised #7 of the Self-Assessment: “Whether I’m happy or not depends mostly on me.”

Study Skills: A Toolbox for Active Learners

- Repositioned study skills materials into one comprehensive section, offering many strategies for Becoming an Active Learner, Reading, Taking Notes, Organizing Study Materials, Rehearsing and Memorizing Study Materials, Taking Tests, and Writing.
- New Self-Assessment of Study Skills, which students can take both before and after they explore the many strategies presented in the Toolbox for Active Learners. When the self-assessment is taken as a pre-test, students learn their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to learning. When the self-assessment is taken as a post-test, students learn which areas they have strengthened and which areas still need improvement.
- New *One Student’s Story* by Michael Chapasko, Blinn College, TX.
- New *One Student’s Story* by Ashley E. Bennet, Heartland Community College, IL.

Proven Features of On Course

The Eighth Edition includes all of the best features of *On Course*, updated and revised from the previous edition.

- **Self-Assessment.** *On Course* begins and ends with a self-assessment questionnaire of important non-cognitive skills (“soft skills”). Scores are provided for self-responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, and belief in oneself. Imagine working with students who develop strengths in all of these inner qualities! Imagine how these qualities will affect the choices the students make and the outcomes and experiences they create. By completing the initial questionnaire, students immediately see areas of weakness that need attention. By completing the concluding

[*On Course*] is directed at students who live complicated lives; the One Student’s Story feature is always relevant to somebody in the class. The case studies are a great way to start conversations that focus on the most urgent needs of students who are often the first in their family to navigate college.

Michelle Cochran,
Rochester Community and
Technical College

The [*On Course*] curriculum is written in a way so as to assess study skills and soft skills without intimidation and provides information and exercises to develop them. Most importantly, [it] places emphasis on mastery through reflection and practice and offers a post self-assessment in order for the student and faculty to measure accomplishment and celebrate success!

Jill Beauchamp,
Washtenaw Community
College

The *On Course* book and class have changed my students' lives; it gives them strategies to make wise choices and decisions that affect their college success, as well as life success. Students who had little hope begin to have hope for their lives and their futures.

Dorothy Collins, Eastern
Gateway Community
College

Journaling is the heart and soul of *On Course*. It helps me check the pulse of my students on a regular basis. I have countless testimonies from students who describe the journaling process as "life-changing." The most reluctant students who ultimately "give in" to journaling often become the most avid supporters of *On Course*.

Gail Janecka,
Victoria College

I absolutely love these [*Case Studies for Critical Thinking*] and spend a lot of time with each of them. My favorite is "A Fish Story," and [I] start my semester with this one. I get students thinking about professors' expectations, their own expectations, motivation, taking the initiative, being prepared for class, and being organized.

Cindy Thorp, SUNY Alfred,
College of Technology

questionnaire, students see their semester's growth. Students have the option of completing the self-assessment either in the text or online in MindTap®.

- **Articles on Proven Success Strategies.** Thirty-two short articles explain powerful strategies for creating success in college and in life. Each article presents a success strategy from influential figures in psychology, philosophy, business, sports, politics, and personal and professional growth. In these articles, students learn the "secrets" of extraordinarily successful individuals.
- **Guided Journal Entries.** A guided journal entry immediately follows each article about a success strategy, giving students an opportunity to apply the strategy they have just learned to enhance their results in college and in life. Many instructors of the course say the guided journal writings are extremely powerful in helping students make new and more effective choices, thus improving their academic success and persistence.
- **CORE Learning System.** All good learners employ four principles that lead to deep and lasting learning. Students learn how to use these four principles to create their own system for learning any subject or skill.
- **Case Studies in Critical Thinking.** Case studies help students apply the strategies they are learning to real-life situations. As such, they help prepare students to make wise choices in the kinds of challenging situations they will likely face in college. Because case studies don't have "right" answers, they promote critical and creative thinking.
- **Focus on Diversity.** The challenges and opportunities of interacting with new cultures is introduced in the first chapter ("Understanding the Culture of Higher Education"), is explored within many articles (e.g., Responsibility and Culture), and is more extensively examined in the article "Respecting Cultural Differences."
- **On Course Principles at Work.** These sections in each chapter show how important the *On Course* success strategies (soft skills) are for choosing the right career, getting hired, and succeeding in the work world.

Support Materials for Students and Instructors

For additional information or for help with accessing support materials related to *On Course*, contact your Cengage Learning Consultant. If you need help finding your learning consultant, visit www.cengage.com, select "College Faculty" from the "Information For ..." menu, and then click "Rep/Learning Consultant" at the top right of the page.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- **MindTap® College Success for *On Course*.** MindTap® College Success for *On Course*, Eighth Edition, is the digital learning solution that helps instructors engage and transform today's students into critical thinkers. Through dynamic assignments and applications that you can personalize, real-time course analytics and an accessible reader, MindTap® helps you turn cookie-cutter into cutting-edge, apathy into engagement, and memorizers into higher-level thinkers. Features include digital versions of the self-assessments and journal entries, videos, and chapter quizzes and homework. MindTap® College Success for *On Course*, Eighth Edition, includes access to the College Success Factors Index (CSFI) 2.0, an online resource that assesses students' patterns of behavior and attitudes in ten areas that have been proven to affect student outcomes for success in college. It allows you to identify at-risk students with early-alert reporting, validate your college success program with a post-course assessment of students' progress, and improve your institution's retention rates. Textbook-specific remediation helps your students strengthen the areas where the survey indicates they need improvement in order to achieve greater success in college. Ask your Cengage Learning Consultant for more details.
- **College Success Planner.** Instructors can package the *On Course* textbook with this 12-month, week-at-a-glance academic planner. The College Success Planner assists students in making the best use of their time both on and off campus and includes additional reading about key learning strategies and life skills for success in college.

The information about diversity and culture that is integrated throughout the text is a much more authentic way to discuss diversity and ethnicity rather than with a one-chapter focus.

Linda McMeen,
North Hennepin
Community College

SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTORS

- **Annotated Instructor's Edition.** To help guide instructors to the many instructional resources found within the Facilitator's Manual, the Annotated Instructor's Edition (ISBN: 9781305647664) provides in the margins specific cross-references directly to ideas and activities available in the Facilitator's Manual. The cross-references are provided by Amy Munson, Director of Instructional Design, United States Air Force Academy, CO.
- **Revised Facilitator's Manual.** The Facilitator's Manual, now offered both in a printed version (ISBN: 9781305647671) and online at the Instructor Companion Site (see below for more information), offers educators specific classroom activities and suggestions from author Skip Downing for using *On Course* in various kinds of courses, and it endeavors to answer questions that educators might have about using the text. Additionally, the Facilitator's Manual includes "best practices" provided by *On Course* instructors; additional study skills activities written by Melanie Marine of the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh; diversity activities provided by LuAnn Wood and Christina Davis, both of Century College;

The At Work sections give students a specific venue to see how the soft skills they acquire will transfer to career success. Semester after semester students will share how their work situation improved as a result of what they learned and tried from the At Work sections. These sections are a natural fit in the *On Course* chapters, and they are packed with pertinent information.

Gail Janecka,
Victoria College

Use *On Course*...because the concepts are all so valuable in the grand scheme of life. In addition, they are presented in a very user-friendly way and the students are encouraged to apply them in college and in life, so results are observable by the end of the semester!

Jill Beauchamp,
Washtenaw Community
College

It is no exaggeration to say this *On Course* Workshop experience was transformative—both professionally and personally. This workshop will long remain a high point of my life. I am feeling energized and eager to start teaching my class next week. I can't wait to use all of my new teaching tools. I will absolutely recommend this workshop to other educators!

Lee Ann Adams, First-Year Seminar Coordinator,
Indiana University East

suggestions for teaching in an online environment written by Pratima Sampat-Mar of Pima Medical Institute and for using MindTap® in an *On Course* program written by Angela C. Thering of Buffalo State College; and a guide for how to successfully integrate the College Success Factors Index (CSFI) with *On Course* written by Gary Williams of Crafton Hills College. One of the most popular elements of the *On Course Facilitator's Manual* is the numerous in-class exercises that encourage students' active exploration of the success strategies presented in the text. These learner-centered exercises include role-playing, learning games, dialogues, demonstrations, metaphors, mind-mappings, brainstorming, questionnaires, drawings, skits, scavenger hunts, and many other activities.

- **Updated Instructor Companion Site.** This free protected website provides educators with many resources to offer a course that empowers students to become active, responsible, and successful learners. Read the Facilitator's Manual (which is also offered in a printed version, as explained above), download PowerPoint slides, view content from the DVD *On Course: A Comprehensive Program for Promoting Student Academic Success and Retention*, and find a useful transition guide for educators who used previous editions of *On Course*. To access the site, follow these steps:
 1. Visit login.cengage.com.
 2. If you have not previously created a faculty account, choose "Create a New Faculty Account" and follow the prompts.
 3. If you have created a faculty account previously, log in with your email address or user name and password.
 4. Search for *On Course* to add the available additional digital resources to your bookshelf.

You will always need to return to login.cengage.com and enter your email address and password to sign in to access these resources. Use this space to write down your email address or user name and password below:

Email Address: _____

Password: _____

- **On Course Workshops and National Conference.** Skip Downing, author of *On Course*, offers faculty development workshops for all educators who want to learn innovative strategies for empowering students to become active, responsible, and successful learners. These highly regarded professional development workshops are offered at conference centers across North America, or you can host a one- to four-day event on your own campus. Online graduate courses (3 credits) are available as a follow-up to two of the workshops. Additionally, you are invited to attend the annual *On Course* National Conference, where hundreds of learner-centered educators gather to share their best practices. For information about these workshops,

graduate courses, and the national conference (including testimonials galore), go to www.oncourseworkshop.com. Questions? Email workshop@oncourseworkshop.com or call 650-365-7623.

- **On Course Newsletter.** All college educators are invited to subscribe to the free *On Course e-Newsletter*. More than 200,000 educators worldwide receive these emails with innovative, learner-centered strategies for engaging students in deep and lasting learning. To subscribe, simply go to www.oncourseworkshop.com and follow the easy, one-click directions. Or you can email a request to workshop@oncourseworkshop.com.

Since first attending one of the summer retreats in 1997, I've held nine full On Course staff development trainings for our college, and I plan to offer more. They are invaluable! I strongly recommend this workshop for all faculty, counselors, advisors, administrators, and support staff.

Philip Rodriguez,
Director, Student Affairs,
Cerritos College

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Numerous wise and caring reviewers have made valuable contributions to this book, and many contributed exercises to the Facilitator's Manual, and I thank them for their contributions:

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Finally, my deep gratitude goes out to the students who over the years have had the courage to explore and change their thoughts, actions, feelings, and beliefs. I hope, as a result, you have all lived richer, more personally fulfilling lives. I know I have.

On Course is the result of my own quest to live a rich, personally fulfilling life and my strong desire to pass on what I've learned to my students. As such, *On Course* is a very personal book, for me and for you. I invite you to explore in depth what success means to you. I suggest that if you want to achieve your greatest potential in college and in life, dig deep inside yourself, where you already possess everything you need to make your dreams come true.

During my first two decades of teaching college courses, I consistently observed a sad and perplexing puzzle. Each semester I watched students sort themselves into two groups. One group achieved varying degrees of academic success, from those who excelled to those who just squeaked by. The other group struggled mightily; then they withdrew, disappeared, or failed. But, here's the puzzling part. The struggling students often displayed as much academic potential as their more successful classmates, and in some cases more. What, I wondered, causes the vastly different outcomes of these two groups? And what could I do to help my struggling students achieve greater success?

Somewhere around my 20th year of teaching, I experienced a series of crises in both my personal and professional lives. In a word, I was struggling. After a period of feeling sorry for myself, I embarked on a quest to improve the quality of my life. I read, I took seminars and workshops, I talked with wise friends and acquaintances, I kept an in-depth journal, I saw a counselor, I even returned to graduate school to add a master's degree in applied psychology to my doctoral degree in English. I was seriously motivated to change my life for the better.

If I were to condense all that I learned into one sentence, it would be this: **People who are successful (by their own definition) consistently make wiser choices than people who struggle.** I came to see that the quality of my life was essentially the result of all of my previous choices. I saw how the wisdom (or lack of wisdom) of my choices influenced, and often determined, the outcomes and experiences of my life. The same, of course, was true for my struggling students.

For two and a half decades, I have continued my quest to identify the inner qualities that empower a person to make consistently wise choices, the very choices that lead to success both in college and in life. As a result of what I learned (and continue to learn), I created a course at my college called the College Success Seminar. This course was a departure from traditional student success courses because instead of focusing primarily on study skills and campus resources, it focused on empowering students from the inside out. I had come to believe that most students who struggle in college are perfectly capable of earning a degree and that their struggles go far deeper than not knowing study skills or failing to use campus resources. As a result, I envisioned a course that

would empower students to develop their natural inner strengths, the qualities that would help them make the wise choices that would create the very outcomes and experiences they wanted in college . . . and in life. When I couldn't find a book that did this, I wrote *On Course*. A few years later, I created a series of professional development workshops to share what I had learned with other educators who want to see their students soar. Then, to provide an opportunity for workshop graduates to continue to exchange their experiences and wisdom, I started a listserv, and this growing group of educators soon named themselves the *On Course* Ambassadors, sharing *On Course* strategies with their students and colleagues alike. Later, I created two online graduate courses that further help college educators learn cutting-edge strategies for empowering their students to be more successful in college and in life. To launch the second decade of *On Course*, the *On Course* Ambassadors hosted the first of many *On Course* National Conferences, bringing together an overflow crowd of educators hungry for new ways to help their students achieve more of their potential in college and in life. Every one of these efforts appeals to a deep place in me because they all have the power to change people's lives for the better. But that's not the only appeal. These activities also help *me* stay conscious of the wise choices I must consistently make to live a richer, more personally fulfilling life.

Now that much of my life is back on course, I don't want to forget how I got here!

Step Alcorn