

# On Course

Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life



**Study  
Skills**  
... PLUS ...  
**EDITION**

**SKIP DOWNING**

# On Course

Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life

## SKIP DOWNING



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**On Course: Strategies for Creating  
Success in College and in Life**  
Skip Downing

To Carol, my compass

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# Preface

*On Course* is intended for college students of any age who want to create success both in college and in life. Whether you are taking a student success or first-year seminar course, a composition course, or an “inward-looking” course in psychology, self-exploration, or personal growth, *On Course* is your instruction manual for dramatically improving the quality of your outcomes and experiences. In each chapter, you’ll learn essential study skills—reading, note-taking, studying, memorizing, test taking, and writing—for success in college. 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* will empower you with time-proven strategies for creating a great life—academic, personal, and professional. You are about to learn the techniques that have helped many thousands of students create extraordinary success! Get ready for the only course you’ll probably ever take where the subject of the course is . . . YOU!

I am grateful that in the dozen years since its first edition, *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.

One suggestion I have received from educators over those dozen years is to expand the coverage of study skills in *On Course*. Some of these educators have chosen *On Course* as their required text and supplement it with additional instruction about study skills. Others have told me they would very much like to empower their students, but they believe students need more extensive instruction in study skills than *On Course* previously provided.

So, as I pondered ways to improve *On Course*, I sought to address this request for more study skills instruction within the spirit of the empowerment approach that is the heart of the text. Specifically, I set a goal to present study skills materials in a way that 1) engages students in a learner-centered construction of study skills knowledge, and 2) gives students practice in applying empowerment strategies. My intention is that students don’t just add a few study skills to their tool box of academic tricks; rather, in the very process of learning how to solve academic challenges with improved study skills, they also learn the empowering process of critical and creative problem solving that will enable them to achieve greater success in all parts of their lives. *On Course*, Study Skills Plus Edition is my effort to achieve that dual goal. Now instructors can select the Sixth Edition which features the CORE Learning System and other proven strategies for success, or instructors can choose the new Study Skills Plus Edition if the course goals align with the added coverage on study skills.

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The new study skills coverage will be a welcome addition. I think it helps to tie together critical pieces to the success puzzle that takes a distinct shape for each individual.

Laura Padgett,  
Lees McRae College

I am thrilled with the CORE Learning Process and integration into the Wise Choices sections. As I read through the first section I was excited about it, and by the 3rd chapter I was ecstatic—it's integrated very well. In the past I had a hard time getting my students to try out the study skills ideas and I needed to create an additional project for them to apply the strategies. Now I can see how these sections will allow them to engage and apply skills each week along with their reading.

Rachel Gray,  
North Central University

I think that the CORE Learning Process is an exceptional way to enable students to organize their materials. Most students utilize one or two of the processes, but in no semblance of order and with no idea of how or why they are doing it. This is definitely an effective tool as it allows the student to work within a logical pattern of gathering, managing, reviewing and assessing their materials.

Josephine Adamo,  
State University of New York  
College at Buffalo

## The Study Skills Plus Edition Helps Students Think Critically about Study Skills

The Study Skills Plus Edition of *On Course* has a unique *Wise Choices in College* section at the end of Chapters 2 through 7. An expanded application of the unique *On Course* CORE Learning System incorporates a six-step problem-solving approach that helps students learn and master one study skill while simultaneously strengthening their critical thinking skills. The six essential study skills presented include reading, taking notes, organizing study materials, rehearsing and memorizing study materials, taking tests, and writing. Here are the six steps that students implement to learn them:

**Step 1: What is my present situation?** To personalize their exploration of each of the six essential study skills, students begin by identifying any challenges they have with the skill under consideration. To help them identify their personal challenges, students read six brief case studies in which other students share the difficulties that they have had with the skill.

**Step 2: How would you like your situation to be?** Next, students are guided to shift their attention from the problem to a solution. To do so, they specify how they would like to improve the study skill under consideration, including the explicit outcomes and experiences they want to create by mastering the skill.

**Step 3: What are my possible choices?** In this step, students learn dozens of the very best strategies for mastering each study skill. They engage actively with the information by giving each strategy a grade (A to F) based on how helpful they think the strategy would be in helping them achieve the goals they defined in Step 1.

**Step 4: What's the likely outcome of each choice?** After reading and rating each strategy, students now review the strategies they rated highest, selecting the specific ones they believe will help them create the most positive learning outcomes and experiences.

**Step 5: Which choices will I commit to doing?** Students are now ready to design their own personal Academic Skills Plan for the particular study skill they want to master. Each Academic Skills Plan includes the student's desired outcomes and experiences (from Step 2), the specific strategies he or she will implement (from Steps 3 and 4), and the specific actions he or she will take to improve the skill. As an example of what such a plan might look like, students read a sample Academic Skills Plan for one of the case study students whose problem was introduced in Step 1.

**Step 6: When and how will I evaluate my plan?** Finally, students determine the date when they will evaluate the success of their Academic Skills Plan and the specific criteria they will use to assess it.

To see a sample of this highly engaging learning process, turn to pages 57–76 and peruse the six steps of the *Wise Choices in College*!



## New and Proven Features Designed for the Study Skills Plus Edition

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

- **Self-Assessment Questionnaires.** *On Course* begins and ends with a self-assessment questionnaire. By completing the initial questionnaire, you can see areas of growth that need attention. By completing the concluding questionnaire, you see your semester's growth. You have the option of completing the questionnaire either in the text or online. An advantage of the online version is that it gives you an immediate print out of your scores. To access the self-assessment online, go to [www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS](http://www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS).
- **Articles on Proven Success Strategies.** Thirty-two brief 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, you'll learn the "secrets" of the extraordinarily successful.
- **NEW! Expanded Coverage of Critical Thinking.** When polled, virtually every college educator agrees that critical thinking is essential for success in college and in life. Through Case Studies for Critical Thinking as well as a new essay and journal entry on critical thinking skills, you'll learn effective ways to solve challenging problems. You'll also learn valuable reasoning skills that will help you create and analyze persuasive arguments. These skills will sharpen your thinking ability and provide you with greater control over the quality of your life.
- **Guided Journal Entries.** A guided journal entry immediately follows each article, giving you an opportunity to apply the success strategy you just learned to enhance your results in college and in life. *Believing in Yourself* articles and journal activities appear in each chapter, reinforcing the importance of developing strong self-esteem for long-term success.
- **Embracing Change Activities.** These activities encourage you to experiment for a week with one of the specific success strategies you have just learned. In this way, you can assess the results that this new choice creates in your life. In many cases, you'll want to add it to your toolbox of success strategies and use it for the rest of your life.
- **One Student's Story—More Added!** A popular feature in earlier editions, these short essays are authored by students who used *On Course* strategies to improve the quality of their college outcomes and experiences. These stories show the positive and dramatic results possible when you apply what you learn in this course to overcome the multitude of challenges that can sabotage success in college, and beyond. With the addition of seven student stories, this edition now offers twenty three inspiring student essays.
- **NEW! CORE Learning System.** Discover and apply the secrets of how effective learners learn. All good learners employ four principles that lead to deep and lasting learning. You'll learn how to use these four principles to create your own system for learning any subject or skill.

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I have to say that I am excited to have my students use *On Course*—the new edition in our classes. The enhanced study skills are a thrill to see and it was genius to use the Wise Choice Process to integrate these skills into the class.

Rosie DuBose,  
Century College

I love the CORE Learning Process. I think it adds depth to the text. I believe the integration is thorough and these will be very effective tools. I have always loved the *On Course* material and never thought it was lacking, but reviewing this material makes me want the new edition now. The additions are insightful improvement.

-Michele Kegley,

Southern State Community College

- **Case Studies for Critical Thinking.** Case studies help you apply the strategies you learn to a real-life situation. As such, they help prepare you to make wise choices in the kinds of challenging situations you will likely face in college. Because case studies don't have "right" answers, they also promote critical and creative thinking.
- **On Course Principles at Work.** These sections show how important the *On Course* success strategies are for choosing the right career, getting hired, and succeeding in the work world.
- **Quotations.** Marginal quotations express the timeless wisdom of famous and not-so-famous people regarding the success strategies under consideration in articles throughout the text.
- **NEW! Cartoons.** Created specifically for *On Course* by Rob Dunalvey, cartoons appear throughout the book and are thematically linked with the success strategies being explored. Plus, they're fun!

### Support for Students

- **Premium Website at [www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS](http://www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS).** This Website includes many resources that will help your understanding of the principles and ideas found in *On Course*. You will find an electronic version of the self-assessments from the text, as well as practice tests, a learning styles inventory, Success Tools that provide various activities that cover various College Success themes, discussion questions, essay topics, and many other exercises that allow for further exploration of text features such as *On Course* at Work and Wise Choices. Greg Cutler from Bay de Noc Community College, MI, has also created study skills specific practice tests for the Premium Website.

### Support for Instructors

- **Additional Premium Website Content. FREE when bundled with new textbooks.** By requesting the free Printed Access Card (PAC) (0495897450) to be packaged with your new textbook order, you and your students will obtain access to new VideoSkillbuilders, interactive video and exercises that showcase real students talking about their struggles and successes in college. More than 15 topics are covered including *Taking Notes to Improve Your Grade*, *Keeping Your Mind and Body in Shape*, *Test Taking*, and *Learning Styles*. Instructors can assign viewing questions for homework and have discussions about the videos in class.
- **NEW! Online Multimedia Ebook.** This Online Multimedia Ebook for *On Course* provides an interactive version of the textbook with linked videos, online journaling, and the electronic version of the self-assessment. Request the Printed Access Card (PAC) (0538792450) for an additional fee for the Premium Website with the Online Multimedia Ebook to be packaged with your new textbook order for you and students to obtain access to the Online Multimedia Ebook as part of the Premium Website.
- **Updated Instructor Companion Site at [www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS](http://www.cengage.com/success/Downing/OnCourseSS).** This website provides educators with many resources



to offer a course that empowers your students to become active, responsible, and successful learners. Download the Facilitator's Manual (which is also offered in a printed version, as explained in number 4 below). Also download PowerPoint Slides, view the 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*.

- **Join the New *On Course* Community Online!** at <http://community.cengage.com/OnCourse/>. If you're a college or university educator seeking innovative ways to help students achieve *greater academic success and retention*, this online community is for you! Connect with *On Course* author Skip Downing, educators, counselors, TeamUP Faculty Program Consultants, and the editors—and stay on top of new ideas to teach your first-year students! We invite you to join the community to participate in discussions to learn and share best practices and resources for making a measurable difference in students' lives.
- **Newly Revised Facilitator's Manual.** The facilitator's manual, now offered both in a printed version (0495897353) and online on the Instructor Companion Site, offers educators specific suggestions for using *On Course* in various kinds of courses, and it endeavors to answer questions that educators might have about using the text. One of the most popular elements of this resource is the numerous in-class exercises that encourage students' active exploration of the success strategies presented in the text. These exercises include role playing, learning games, dialogues, demonstrations, metaphors, mind-mappings, brainstorming, questionnaires, drawings, skits, scavenger hunts, and many others.
- **NEW! Powerlecture CD-ROM for *On Course* Study Skills Plus Edition** (0495906743). PowerLecture contains a brand new test bank in the Examview test-generating software, enhanced instructor PowerPoint slides specific to the Study Skills Plus Edition created by *On Course* Ambassador Carmen Eitienne of Oakland University, MI, and a PDF of the Facilitator's Guide. The test bank materials were created by *On Course* Ambassador, Dana Murphy of National Park Community College, AR. Use the dynamic software to create customized exams specific to your class!
- ***On Course: A Comprehensive Program for Promoting Student Academic Success and Retention* DVD** (0547002173). This DVD provides instructors with an overview of the problems that keep today's capable students from being successful, complete with an explanation by author Skip Downing about how *On Course* differs from other student success approaches. Additional features on this DVD include a description of the extensive *On Course* learner-centered resources, videos of three students presenting their One Student's Story essays that appear in the text, and a sample *On Course* learner-centered activity, facilitated by Skip Downing. Following the activity, a group of college and university educators discuss how this same activity positively affected their students. Presented in short chapters, parts of this DVD are intended for instructors and other parts are perfect for showing to students.



- **NEW! Online Course Cartridge Materials.** If you're offering your *On Course* class online, you'll want to check out the new course cartridge materials in WebTutor, which can be used with Blackboard, WebCT, and Angel platforms. The WebTutor offers a number of instructor resources to complement the main text including discussion questions and gradebook content. Additional features include journal activities, essays topics, samples of student work, personal research assignments, workplace related activities, technology exercises, discussion board topics, quizzes, links to the student web site and interactive reflection tasks. Instructors have the option of using the electronic grade book, receiving assignments from students via the Internet, and tracking student use of the communication and collaboration functions. An access code is required for purchase by your students to reach this material. This resource is available for packaging with a new textbook as a Printed Access Code (PAC) or students can purchase an Instant Access Code (IAC) online at [ichapters.com](http://ichapters.com). Talk to your Cengage Sales Representative for more information. Need help finding your sales representative? Visit <http://academic.cengage.com>.
- **NEW! Ebook.** An Ebook is now available for *On Course*. Students can download the complete *On Course* textbook at a cost savings at Cengage Learning's Online Bookstore, <http://ichapters.com>.
- **Assessment Tools.** If you're looking for additional ways to assess your students, Cengage Learning has additional resources for you to consider. For more in depth information on any of the following items, talk with your sales rep, or visit the *On Course* web site.
  - **College Success Factors Index:** This pre- and post-test determines student's strengths and weaknesses in areas proven to be determinants of college success.
  - **CL Assessment and Portfolio Builder:** This personal development tool engages students in self-assessment, critical thinking and goal setting activities to prepare them for college and the workplace. The access code for this item also provides students with access to the Career Resource Center.
  - **Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory:** *The Retention Management System™ College Student Inventory* (CSI from Noel-Levitz) is an early-alert, early-intervention program that identifies students with tendencies that contribute to dropping out of school. Students can participate in an integrated, campuswide program. Cengage Learning offers you three assessment options that evaluate students on 19 different scales: Form A (194 items), Form B (100 items), or an online etoken (that provides access to either Form A, B, or C (74 items). Advisors are sent three interpretive reports: The Student's Report, the Advisor/Counselor Report, and The College Summary and Planning Report.

- **The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) Instrument<sup>1</sup>:** MBTI is the most widely used personality inventory in history—and it is also available for packaging with *On Course*. The standard Form M self-scorable instrument contains 93 items that determine preferences on four scales: Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, and Judging-Perceiving.
- **College Success Planner.** Package your *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. Ask your Cengage Learning sales representative for more details.
- **Cengage Learning's TeamUP Faculty Program Consultants.** An additional service available with this textbook is support from **TeamUP Faculty Program Consultants**. For more than a decade, our consultants have helped faculty reach and engage first-year students by offering peer-to-peer consulting on curriculum and assessment, faculty training, and workshops. Our consultants are higher education professionals who provide full-time support helping educators establish and maintain effective student success programs. They are available to help you to establish or improve your student success program and provide training on the implementation of our textbooks and technology. To connect with your TeamUP Faculty Program Consultant, call 1-800-528-8323 or visit [www.cengage.com/teamup](http://www.cengage.com/teamup).
- **On Course Workshops and 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 three-day event on your own campus. An online graduate course (3 credits) is available as a follow up to two of the workshops. Additionally, you are invited to participate in 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](http://www.oncourseworkshop.com). Questions? Email [info@OnCourseWorkshop.com](mailto:info@OnCourseWorkshop.com).
- **On Course Newsletter.** All college educators are invited to subscribe to the free *On Course Newsletter*. More than forty thousand educator-subscribers worldwide receive biweekly emails (monthly in the summer) with innovative, learner-centered strategies for engaging students in deep and lasting learning. To subscribe, simply go to [www.oncourseworkshop.com](http://www.oncourseworkshop.com) and follow the easy one-click directions.

<sup>1</sup> MBTI and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.



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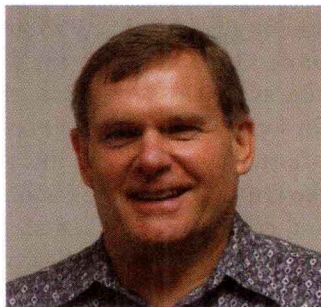
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Finally, my deep gratitude goes out to the students who over the years have had the courage to explore and change their thoughts, actions, feelings, and beliefs. I hope, as a result, you have all lived richer, more personally fulfilling lives. I know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

## Travel with Me

*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 twentieth year of teaching, I experienced a series of crises in both my personal and professional life. 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 nearly two 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, it focused on empowering students from the inside out. I had come to realize 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. 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 On Course National Conference, 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 alonny

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