

# ON COURSE

Strategies for Success in College, Career, and Life



**SKIP DOWNING**  
**JONATHAN BRENNAN**

# On Course

Strategies for Creating Success in College, Career, and Life

Ninth Edition

**Skip Downing**  
**Jonathan Brennan**



Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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in College, Career, and Life,*  
Ninth Edition  
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## DEDICATIONS

Skip Downing:

*To Carol, my compass*

Jonathan Brennan:

*To all my students, who have taught me  
so many lessons*



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*On Course* is intended for college students of any age who want to create success in college, in their career, and in life. Whether students are taking a student success or first-year seminar course, a career course, a writing course, a course in any discipline, 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. Through self-assessments, articles, guided journals, case studies in critical thinking, and inspiring stories from other students, *On Course* empowers students with time-proven strategies for creating a great life—academic, professional, and personal. Online resources within MindTap additionally provide students with essential study skills. Students learn the techniques that have helped hundreds of thousands of students create extraordinary success!

Since its first publication in 1996, *On Course* has become a market leader, standing out in the crowded field of student success texts. Increasingly, educators and researchers are finding (as we have) that engaging and 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. Our 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

- **On Course at Work.** The ninth edition of *On Course* shows how all the skills learned in this course will help students succeed in their careers. Every career article in the book has been revised and greatly expanded to show students how the same skills that will help them excel in college will help them succeed in the work world. Topics include the contribution to career success of essential soft skills: personal responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, and believing in oneself. The technical career preparation and employment skills addressed include choosing a major, selecting a career, résumé and cover letter preparation, seeking mentors, personal branding, interview preparation, performance reviews, networking, maintaining work-life balance, and employee engagement.

[*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

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 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

- **Healthy Choices.** Making healthy choices can be challenging, especially in college. Appearing in Chapters 2 through 8, these new articles discuss topics that directly affect students' health—and their academic success. Topics include alcohol, drugs, smoking, food, nonalcoholic drinks, exercise, and sleep. Each article provides an overview of the latest scientific research on the topic and ends with wise choices students can make to ensure success—in college, in their career, and in life.
- **Six New “One Student’s Stories.”** A popular feature in earlier editions, these short essays—now numbering 32 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.
- **Developing grit.** This article explores the role grit plays in student success. It encourages students to take the Grit Scale, developed by psychologist Angela Duckworth, and offers strategies for how students can increase their grit and, thus, their perseverance in completing a college degree.
- **Discussion on hope theory.** Researcher Charles Snyder has demonstrated that students with higher “hope levels” earn better grades and have higher graduation rates than students with low hope levels. This new content provides specific strategies students can use to raise their hope levels, increasing their motivation to succeed in college.
- **Developing a growth mindset.** Psychologists, inspired by the work of Stanford’s Carol Dweck, have confirmed that mindsets influence the choices that learners make and thus shape students’ academic outcomes. This revised article guides students to choose a “growth” mindset, proven to help students excel as learners.
- **Information competency.** This newly expanded article encourages students to apply the critical thinking skills they’ve learned in the book to distinguish between accurate and false information. The article discusses the importance of information competency, how to identify false information (especially from online or social media sources), how to avoid common scams that target college students, and how to improve one’s information competency. A revised journal entry asks students to reflect on and apply their new skills in information competency.
- **Tech Tips.** Many websites and apps are available to help students achieve greater success. *On Course* features updated Tech Tips sections that identify 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 and learning.

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

## Chapter 1

- At the request of a number of *On Course* instructors, “Money Matters” has been moved to the end of Chapter 1, thus helping students early in the semester to reduce struggles caused by financial difficulties.
- New: *One Student's Story* by Kineesha George, San Juan College, NM.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Soft Skills at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Money.”
- New: *One Student's Story* by Emily Christman, Brigham Young University, ID.

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

Lisa Marks, Ozarks  
Technical Community  
College

## Chapter 2

- New: *One Student's Story* by Konnie Kellogg, Donnelly College, KS.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Personal Responsibility at Work.”
- Updated and expanded: “Tech Tips: Personal Responsibility.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Introduction.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Alcohol.”
- Moved: *One Student's Story* by Brandeé Huigens, Northeast Iowa Community College, IA, from Chapter 6.

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

Debbie Unsold,  
Washington State  
Community College

## Chapter 3

- New content: Hope theory and its impact on motivation.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Self-Motivation at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Self-Motivation.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Drugs.”

## Chapter 4

- Revised: “Time and Culture” section.
- Revised: Developing Self-Discipline section to focus on “Developing Grit.”
- Completely revised and expanded: “Self-Management at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Self-Management.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Smoking.”

*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

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 5

- Revised: “Respecting Cultural Differences” article.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Interdependence at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Interdependence.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Food.”

## Chapter 6

- Completely revised and expanded: “Self-Awareness at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Self-Awareness.”
- Revised: “Write Your Own Rules” article.
- Moved: *One Student’s Story* by Freddie Davila, The Victoria College, TX, from Chapter 2.
- New: “Healthy Choices: Drinks (Nonalcoholic).”

## Chapter 7

- Revised: “Developing a Learning Orientation to Life” to focus on “Developing a Growth Mindset.”
- New: Journal Entry 24.
- Revised and expanded: Article on critical thinking and information competency.
- Revised: Journal Entry 26.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Lifelong Learning at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Lifelong Learning.”
- New: *One Student’s Story* by Dalene Meek, San Juan College, NM.
- New: “Healthy Choices: Physical Activity.”
- New: *One Student’s Story* by Crystal Kim, California State University–Fullerton, CA.

## Chapter 8

- New: *One Student’s Story* by Faith Hannah Lea, Daytona State College, FL.
- Completely revised and expanded: “Emotional Intelligence at Work.”
- Updated: “Tech Tips: Emotional Intelligence.”
- New: “Healthy Choices: Sleep.”

## Chapter 9

- No changes made.

## Study Skills: A Toolbox for Active Learners

- Contains expanded coverage from Study Skills Plus version of *On Course*.
- Moved to MindTap.

## What's New in This Edition of *On Course*: MindTap

MindTap for *On Course*, ninth edition, is the digital learning solution that helps students take charge of their success by encouraging the creation of academic, professional, and personal goals, and prompting regular reflection on progress toward them. With the *On Course* self-assessments, its integrated personal success indicator and early-alert reporting feature, MindTap for *On Course* helps your students assess and improve the specific behaviors, attitudes, and skills that have been proven to lead to college and career success. It also helps you, as an instructor, to easily personalize student learning by seamlessly combining your own assignments, YouTube videos, open-source content, and innovative course activities with Cengage's market-leading content into a singular learning path designed to truly elevate student thinking. Ask your Cengage Learning Consultant for more details:

- **Take Charge of Your Success folder.** The Take Charge of Your Success folder empowers students to set goals and plan out their future. In the “Set Your Goals” activity, students reflect on what’s most important to them and set short- and long-term goals for themselves. In the “Create an Academic and Career Plan” activity, students map out the courses, work, and extracurriculars in which they plan to take part to transfer or earn their degree.
- **Connect with Campus and Community Resources.** New “Connect with Campus and Community Resources” activities appear within every chapter of MindTap. In this activity, students will locate helpful resources for use now and in the future so they know where to go and what to do to achieve their goals.
- **What Would You Do? activities.** New “What Would You Do?” activities in every chapter tie course concepts to real-world scenarios. At each step, students must decide what they will do when presented with a task or challenge. After every choice, students learn about possible benefits and consequences for their actions, as well as strategies for increasing the likelihood of success.
- **Chapter-level reflections.** New chapter reflections encourage students to make wise choices and form strong habits that will propel them toward the future they want. They reflect on the lessons from their readings, quizzes, and assignments and create habits that will help them meet the goals and plans they’ve set out to achieve.

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

[*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* 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

- **Study Skills: A Toolbox for Active Learners.** The Toolbox for Active Learners is now located exclusively in MindTap. This version includes the additional content from the Study Skills Plus version of *On Course*, so students have access to all the available study skills content.
- **Pathbrite ePortfolio.** The Pathbrite ePortfolio app within MindTap allows students to collect, track, and showcase their work for graduation, accreditation, and job placement. The new goal setting, academic planning, campus and community resources activity, and chapter reflections immediately sync to their portfolio. When the course is over, students can continue to update and take their portfolio with them by visiting Pathbrite.com.
- **On Course journal entries.** The renowned guided journal entries within *On Course* have been reformatted to sync with students' Pathbrite ePortfolio, allowing them to look back and reflect on their progress after the course ends.

## Proven Features of *On Course*

The ninth 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 that need strengthening. By completing the concluding 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 success strategies from diverse and 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 success strategy article, giving students an opportunity to apply the strategy they have just learned to enhance their results in college, career, and 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. The CORE Learning System is now solely offered online with the accompanying MindTap.
- **Case studies in critical thinking.** *On Course* 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. These case studies promote critical and creative thinking because there is no clear “right” or “wrong” answer.
- **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 greatly expanded 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/repfinder](http://www.cengage.com/repfinder).

### SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- **Cengage Unlimited.** The first-of-its-kind digital subscription designed specially to lower textbook costs. Students get total access to everything Cengage has to offer on demand—in one place. That’s 20,000 eBooks, 2,300 digital learning products, and dozens of study tools across 70 disciplines and over 675 courses. Currently available in select markets. Details at [www.cengage.com/unlimited](http://www.cengage.com/unlimited).
- **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.

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

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

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

## SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTORS

- **Revised Facilitator's Manual.** The Facilitator's Manual, now offered both in a printed version (ISBN: 978-0-357-02270-2) and online at the Instructor Companion Site (see below for more information), offers educators specific classroom activities and suggestions from authors Skip Downing and Jonathan Brennan for using *On Course* in various kinds of courses, and it answers questions that educators have asked 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; 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 secure 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 previously), download PowerPoint slides, access a new test bank, and find a useful transition guide and MindTap Educator Guide for educators who used previous editions of *On Course* or are interested in using MindTap. To access the site, follow these steps:
  1. Visit [login.cengage.com](http://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](http://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:

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Password:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **On Course Workshops and National Conference.** Skip Downing and Jonathan Brennan, authors of *On Course*, offer 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 the United States, 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 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.oucourseworkshop.com](http://www.oucourseworkshop.com). Questions? Email [workshop@oucourseworkshop.com](mailto:workshop@oucourseworkshop.com) or call 650-365-7623.
- **On Course Newsletter.** All college educators are invited to subscribe to the free *On Course e-Newsletter*. Nearly 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.oucourseworkshop.com](http://www.oucourseworkshop.com) and follow the easy, one-click directions. Or you can email a request to [workshop@oucourseworkshop.com](mailto:workshop@oucourseworkshop.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



# Acknowledgments

This book would not exist without the assistance of an extraordinary group of people. We can only hope that we have returned (or will return) their wonderful support in kind.

At Cengage Learning, we would like to especially thank Rebecca Charles for her wisdom, good cheer, hard work, and commitment to making this edition of *On Course* the best ever. Additionally, our thanks go to Courtney Bryant and Thalia Prum for their unflagging attention to details and encouraging guidance. At On Course Workshops, we'd like to thank the extraordinary support and wisdom of our colleagues and friends Robin Middleton, Deb Poese, Eileen Zamora, Mark McBride, LuAnn Wood, Amy Munson, Katherine Orille, and Carolina Williams. Thanks also to the 2,000-plus On Course Ambassadors, some of the most dedicated and caring educators in the world, who work tirelessly to empower their students and colleagues with On Course principles and practices.

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

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Finally, our 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. We hope, as a result, you have all lived richer, more personally fulfilling lives. We know we 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, your career, 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?

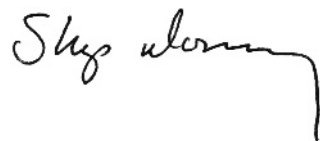
Somewhere around my 20th year of teaching, I experienced a series of crises in both my personal and professional lives. In a word, I was struggling. After a period of feeling sorry for myself, I embarked on a quest to improve the quality of my life. I read, I took seminars and workshops, I talked with wise friends and acquaintances, I kept an in-depth journal, I saw a counselor, and 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 three 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 in college, career, 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 wanted 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!



Back when I was a student, I didn't know many of the skills in *On Course*, but I sure could have used them. I made some unwise choices, found myself failing classes, and eventually dropped out of high school. I lost sight of my dream of going to college. It took me years to make my way back to college, but once I did, I learned how to make wiser choices, develop better habits, and take more responsibility for my learning and my future. I completed college and went on to earn four graduate degrees. I've learned a few things on my journey (sometimes the hard way), and I hope you're open to learning some new life lessons too.

In my early years as a professor, I saw many students struggling with the same problems I had. These students had so much potential, but I saw them making unwise choices, failing classes, then dropping out. I really wanted to help these students stay in college and realize their dreams.

Twenty years ago, I began to learn how I could help these students. I had an opportunity to attend a multi-day On Course Workshop led by Dr. Skip Downing. Within the first 45 minutes, I was excited to learn that the workshop provided the answers to two questions I had been pondering for many years: (1) Why do so

many of my students struggle in my classes, and at the college? and (2) How can I help these students succeed?

Energized and focused, I returned to my college with fresh ideas, a new perspective, and a bold plan. I proposed that we start a student success program, and within one year, we did. In our new success courses, students learned *On Course* skills and how to apply them to make wiser choices. The challenges were significant because many of the students at our college dropped out within their first year. However, after starting our new program, student retention increased by 22 percent! That meant many more students were learning how to be successful in college, in their careers, and in life.

Once I saw what a powerful impact the program had on students in my classes, and on students across the college, I made a commitment: I will significantly increase retention and graduation rates for one million college students. I had no idea how I would make that happen, but nevertheless I committed to it.

I eventually realized that I would need to teach many other educators how to use these strategies with their students. After years of training to become a facilitator of *On Course* Workshops, I began to travel to colleges and universities across North America, eventually working with thousands of educators. I also offered to chair the *On Course* National Conference, where nearly 5,000 educators have come together to learn new success strategies. I calculated how many educators I would need to reach to impact a million students. After 12 years I accomplished my goal, and I promptly reset the goal to impact 10 million students.

Working with Skip as co-author of the *On Course* text is my next step toward reaching my new goal. Please join the over one million students who have used *On Course* to achieve their dreams. I'm pleased with the many new tools we offer in this ninth edition. I hope you will take advantage of the skills you will learn in *On Course*, and that you will use them at college, in the workplace, and for the rest of your life.

So, get on board and travel with us on a new adventure. You'll discover new strengths, develop effective habits, and dream up a great future for yourself.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial letter.





# Getting On Course to Your Success

## Successful Students . . .

- ▶ **accept personal responsibility**, seeing themselves as the primary cause of their outcomes and experiences.
- ▶ **discover self-motivation**, finding purpose in their lives by pursuing personally meaningful goals and dreams.
- ▶ **master self-management**, consistently planning and taking purposeful actions in pursuit of their goals and dreams.
- ▶ **employ interdependence**, building mutually supportive relationships that help them achieve their goals and dreams (while helping others do the same).

## Struggling Students . . .

- ▶ **see themselves as victims**, believing that what happens to them is determined primarily by external forces such as fate, luck, and powerful others.
- ▶ **have difficulty sustaining motivation**, often feeling depressed, frustrated, and/or resentful about a lack of direction in their lives.
- ▶ **seldom identify specific actions needed to accomplish a desired outcome** and, when they do, tend to procrastinate.
- ▶ **are stubbornly independent**, seldom requesting, even rejecting, offers of assistance from those who could help, and failing to build effective and supportive relationships with others.

## College Smart-Start Guide

If you've ever bought a new computer, tablet, or smartphone, you'll recall that it came with a user's manual. The user's manual—whether in print or online—is many pages long and contains all you need to know to get the most from your new device.

Think of *On Course* as your user's manual for higher education. It explains how to get the most out of college. In these pages, you'll discover how to learn effectively, how to get high grades, and how to earn the degree you want. As a bonus, many of the strategies you'll learn will help you achieve success in other key areas of your life, including your career.

Most computers also come with a brief guide that's only a few pages long. This guide describes the essential steps for getting your computer up and running quickly and successfully.

This Smart-Start Guide has that same intention for college. Complete the following actions before the end of your first week in college, and you'll be off to a great start. Some of these actions can be done in a few minutes. Others take longer. You can do them in any order you choose.

So, read and do the following lucky 13 actions. Be smart—complete one of them right now. Do a couple more every day, and you'll have them all done by the end of your first week. By then, you'll be on course to great success in higher education.

### WHAT TO DO DURING YOUR FIRST WEEK IN COLLEGE

#### GET FAMILIAR

- 1. Learn your campus.** Find out where things are so you begin to feel comfortable. What's in the various buildings? Where will you find the many services designed to help you succeed? To orient yourself, get a campus map. There's probably one on your college's website.

If your campus offers tours, take one. If not, ask a college employee or an experienced student to show you around. Or ask another first-year student to join you on a self-guided tour. As a last resort, explore on your own. See if you can fill in the location and hours for all of the services listed in Figure 1.1.

Service	Location	Hours
College Bookstore		
Advising Office		
Counseling Office		
Student Activities Office		
Financial Aid Office		
Career Center		
Registrar's Office		
Library		

**FIGURE 1.1**

Service	Location	Hours
Tutoring or Academic Support		
Computer Center or Lab		
Dining Facilities		
Fitness Center		
Athletic Facilities		
Student Center		
Copy Center		
Public Safety		
Health Services		
Other?		
Other?		

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**FIGURE 1.1** (Continued)

- 2. Locate your classrooms.** Find and visit every room in which you have a class. Nothing ruins your first week like missing classes because you can't find the rooms. You'll likely find a list of your courses and classrooms on the document you received when you registered. Use this information to fill in the first two columns in Figure 1.2.
- 3. Learn your instructors' names, office locations, and office hours.** Instructors' names are usually listed on your registration document next to each course. If an instructor is listed as "TBA"—or something other than a name—an instructor has not yet been assigned to the class. (TBA stands for "to be announced.") In that case, you'll need to get your instructor's name at the department

office or the first class meeting. In Figure 1.2, record your instructors' names, office locations, and office hours. Office hours are times when instructors are in their office and available for appointments . . . and you'll want to make an appointment soon. This additional information will likely be on the first-day handout for each class. (A first-day handout is often called a "syllabus.")

- 4. Study—don't just skim—the first-day handout (syllabus) for each course.** The syllabus is a contract between you and your instructor. In it, your instructor presents essential information about the course. Typically, a syllabus contains:
  - a course description (usually the same description as in the college catalog);

Course	Classroom	Instructor	Office	Office Hours

**FIGURE 1.2**



- b) learning objectives (what you are expected to learn in the course);
- c) homework assignments (possibly every assignment for the entire course);
- d) exam schedule (when you'll be tested);
- e) how your final grade will be determined (how much each assignment is worth);
- f) course rules (what to do and not do, along with consequences);
- g) website address (if course materials are posted online); and
- h) information about the instructor (name, office location, and office hours).

The syllabus may be the single most important document your instructors provide, so read it carefully. Now is the time to ask questions about the syllabus. Your instructors will assume that if you stay in the course, you understand the syllabus and agree to abide by it.

## GET ORGANIZED

**5. Get all your learning supplies.** Every job has both a purpose and essential tools. Job #1 in college is deep learning. Deep learning occurs when you have a thorough understanding of the subject and can carry this knowledge with you for the rest of your life. So, make a list of all the supplies you'll need in order to learn, such as books, a computer/laptop/tablet, calculator, notebooks, three-ring binders, notepaper, pens, monthly calendars, weekly calendars, folders, and flash drives. Of these supplies, arguably the most essential are your textbooks. Required texts are listed in each syllabus (first-day handout). They can be purchased in your campus bookstore and perhaps online as well. Ideally, you'll have your textbooks in hand before your first

class meeting. At the latest, get them before the end of Week 1, because any later can sabotage your success. College instructors move quickly and expect you to come to class prepared. If you're just starting to read your assignments in Week 3, your chances of success plunge.

- 6. Create a schedule.** Adding college assignments and activities to your life can be overwhelming. A schedule is essential for getting everything important done on time. Whether your schedule is on paper, on your smartphone, online, or you use some other method, tracking your commitments is essential. Make a weekly schedule showing recurring events such as classes, study times, or work. Make a monthly calendar showing due dates for occasional events such as tests, term papers, or meetings with instructors. You'll find weekly and monthly calendars in the section called "Creating a Leak-Proof Self-Management System" in Chapter 4.
- 7. Get comfortable with campus technology.** The use of technology is common on college campuses. Check each course syllabus to see what technology your instructors expect you to use. They may send you course updates using campus email. Or expect you to access online resources for their classes. You may be taking a class that is offered partly or entirely online via a course management system (CMS). Some of the more common course management systems are Blackboard (BB), Desire to Learn (D2L), Canvas, and Moodle. It's possible your instructor will arrange some technology help for your class. Regardless, be proactive. Go to your campus computer lab and see if an

orientation is offered. If not, ask someone in the computer lab to help you learn what you need to know (as defined in each course syllabus). Or find a classmate with good technology skills and ask for help.

- 8. Manage your money.** Money problems have sabotaged many students' success in college. Some have had to drop out of college to work. Others have tried working full-time while attending college, but they became overwhelmed. An important step toward understanding your financial situation is creating a budget. That will tell you (in case you don't already know) if money is going to be an obstacle to your success in college. If you're serious about your education, there are many options to help you overcome the money obstacle. You'll find many suggestions about money management later in this chapter.

## GET SERIOUS

- 9. Set goals for each course.** Make a list of your courses. Next to each one, write your target grade for the course. Then write a goal for the most important thing or things you want to learn in the course.
- 10. Attend all classes and arrive on time.** Class attendance is essential to success in college. Remember, Job #1 as a student is deep learning, and learning starts in the classroom. Many college instructors do not take attendance, but don't mistakenly think that means you don't need to be there.
- 11. Participate in every class.** Active engagement is the key to deep learning. (Remember, deep learning means you've gained a thorough understanding of the subject and can carry this knowledge with you for the rest of your life.) Attend each class having done all assignments beforehand. Ask questions about your homework. Answer questions your instructors ask. When instructors facilitate an activity, they're intending that you learn something important through the experience. Participate at a high level and look for the learning.
- 12. Complete and hand in all assignments on time.** Make a list of all assignments and their due dates. Record them, along with test dates, on your monthly calendar so you can see them coming. Check them off as you finish each one. Here's the double benefit. First, you'll learn more when you attend classes having completed all assigned homework. As a bonus, you'll reduce the stress that many first-year college students experience when they fall behind.
- 13. Commit to your success.** At the end of your first week, think back over your experiences with each course. Be honest with yourself. Will you make the time necessary to do all of the work? Are you prepared to give the course your best effort? If not, discuss your concerns with your adviser or a counselor. If your concerns continue, now may be the time to drop the course (and perhaps pick up another course in its place). But if your answer is "yes" to doing all of the course work and giving it your very best effort, then write out this solemn commitment and post it where you will see it every day: *I promise myself to give a 100 percent effort every day to every course. Nothing will keep me from achieving success!*

## Understanding the Culture of Higher Education

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

What is unique about the culture of higher education? How does understanding that culture increase your chances of success in college?

In some ways, enrolling in college is like moving to a foreign country. That's because the culture of higher education is different from other cultures you have known, even that of high school.



Frank Cotham/The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank

*"Be prepared to encounter cultural references that we're just not going to get."*

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch psychologist and anthropologist, has studied cultures all over the world. According to Hofstede, culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another." Every culture on Earth is programmed to operate by its own unique software. And this is true of higher education as well. The sooner you understand the culture of higher education, the sooner you will be on course to success.

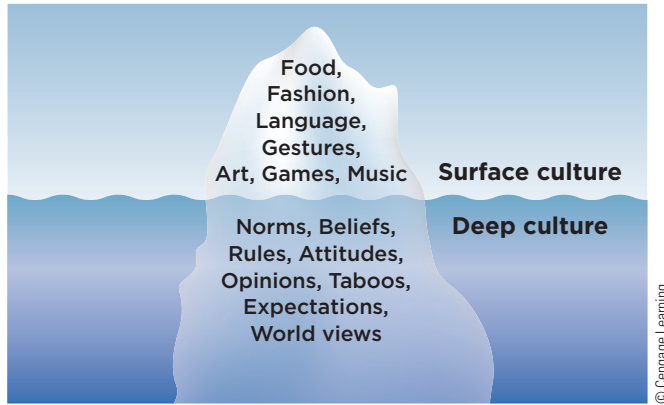
Some aspects of a culture are obvious and visible, whereas others are subtle and invisible. To understand the distinction between visible and invisible culture, Brooks Peterson, author of *Cultural Intelligence*, suggests picturing an iceberg (see Figure 1.3). Above the waterline are the elements of culture we can perceive with our five senses.

"Surface" culture includes such things as food, fashions, language, gestures, games, art, music, holidays, and some customs. For example, when someone speaks with a noticeable accent (different from yours), you know immediately he is from a different culture.

Below the waterline you'll find the more stable and significant features of "deep culture." Most of these features are invisible to tourists and recent immigrants. Deep culture consists of the shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, rules, opinions, expectations, and taboos of a group of people. For natives, these deep-culture features are usually taken for granted until someone disobeys them. Here's a simple example. When you arrive at a ticket line, what do you do? If you're from a culture that expects to wait or stand in a line, you automatically go to the end of the line. No sign is needed because everyone knows that's what you're supposed to do. You probably don't even think about it unless someone cuts in front of you. When someone defies a cultural rule, others get upset. Cultural programs help a group or society run smoothly by keeping people in line (literally and figuratively).

**T**oto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

*Dorothy, in **The Wizard of Oz***



**FIGURE 1.3** Cultural Iceberg

Culture, then, is the collection of surface- and deep-level customs and beliefs that are passed on from generation to generation. Each culture provides “approved” choices at significant, and even insignificant, forks in the road. Culture tells us, “This choice is normal and that one is strange.” Or, “This choice is right and that one is wrong.” Or, “This choice is good and that choice is bad.” At each fork in the road, our inner programs give us a nudge in the culturally approved direction.

To put it succinctly, “Culture is the way we do things around here.”

## THE SURFACE CULTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Because college is a unique culture, expect some challenges as you adapt. But fear not . . . you will adapt and very soon feel comfortable. Most differences in surface culture will be pretty obvious. They include factors such as class sizes; appropriate dress; amount of homework assigned; students’ races, ages, religions; holidays observed; courses offered; and methods of teaching. Like all cultures, higher education has its own language, so you’ll probably hear words that sound foreign to you. Suppose your instructor announces, “The directions for the assignment are posted in the course syllabus on Moodle.” These directions make little sense if you don’t know the lingo. But it’s not really that complicated. Here’s what the natives of college culture know:

- A **syllabus** is a document that most instructors provide at the first class session. It contains essential information about the course such as learning objectives, homework assignments, course rules, and how the course grade is determined. If you recognized the term “syllabus” from the Smart-Start Guide, congratulations. You’re already learning to speak “college.”

**S**chools, like ethnic groups, have their own cultures: languages, ways of doing things, values, attitudes toward time, standards of appropriate behavior, and so on. As participants in schools, students are expected to adopt, share, and exhibit these cultural patterns. If they do not or cannot, they are likely to be censured and made to feel uncomfortable in a variety of ways.

Jean Moule, *Cultural Competence*

- **Moodle** is a computer software program that allows colleges to offer class content on the Internet. (Similar programs are Blackboard, Canvas, and Desire2Learn.) If your instructor doesn't provide directions for accessing course information posted on the Internet, contact the folks in your campus computer lab for help.

Keep reminding yourself that entering college is like entering another country. If you hear words and terms you don't understand, be sure to ask what they mean. It won't be long before you're talking like a native. Now let's take a look at a less obvious feature of cultures than unfamiliar words.

## ONE DOZEN COLLEGE CUSTOMS

Higher education, like all cultures, has customs. These are the things the natives of higher education expect you to know and do. Heeding the following dozen customs will smooth your path through college, keep you out of dead ends, and speed you on to graduation:

What we call customs rest on top and are most apparent. Deepest and least apparent are the cultural values that give meaning and direction to life. Values influence people's perceptions of needs and their choice between perceived alternative courses of action.

Benjamin Paul,  
anthropologist

1. **Read your college catalog.** Catalogs are usually available in the registrar's or counseling office. Many colleges also post a copy on their website. A catalog contains most of the factual information you'll need to plot a successful journey through higher education. It explains how your college applies many of the customs discussed in this section. So, keep a college catalog on hand and refer to it often. By the way, if a requirement in the catalog changes after you enroll at a college, usually you are bound by only the rules that existed when you first entered. So hold on to your past catalogs.
2. **Create a long-term educational plan.** This plan lists all of the courses you'll take from now until graduation. It assures that you *do* take all required courses and *don't* take any unrequired courses (unless you want to). Colleges provide someone to help you create an educational plan. This person could be an adviser, a counselor, or even an instructor (especially if you have chosen a major—see #5 below). Find out who this person is and make an appointment. It's never too early to map out your straightest route to graduation. Like most plans, it can always be revised.
3. **Complete general education requirements.** Look in your college catalog for a list of general education courses. Almost all colleges and universities require students to complete a minimum number of credits in general education. Your institution may call them something else, such as *core requirements*, *core curriculum*, or *general curriculum*. Regardless of their name, the purpose of general education requirements is to expose you to a number of broad areas of study—for example, natural sciences, communication, technology, math, languages, humanities, and social and behavioral science. Typically, you'll need to complete a certain number of credits in some or all of these areas. Regardless of how many credits you earn, you can't earn a degree until you've completed all general education



requirements. That's why your long-term educational plan (#2 above) will always include the general education courses you intend to take.

4. **Complete prerequisites and corequisites.** A prerequisite is a course that must be successfully completed before taking a more advanced course. For example, colleges usually require passing algebra before taking calculus. Before you register for courses each semester, check each course description in your college catalog. Any prerequisites will be identified in the course description. Confirm you have completed all prerequisites before registering for a course. A corequisite, which will also be identified in the course description, is a course that must be taken at the same time as another course. Verify and enroll in any corequisites.
5. **Choose a major.** You'll usually choose a major area of study in your first or second year. Examples of majors include nursing, English, mechanical engineering, economics, and commercial art. You'll take many courses in your major, supplemented by general education and elective courses. (An elective is a course you don't have to take but want to.) Having a career goal makes choosing your major easier. If you are undecided about a career, visit your campus career center. There you'll get help identifying careers that fit your interests, talents, and personality. All majors and their required courses are listed in your college catalog. Until you've entered a major, you're wise to concentrate on completing your general education requirements. That will ensure that all the credits you earn will count toward your degree.
6. **Meet with your instructors during their office hours.** Most college instructors have regular office hours. These times are usually included in the course syllabus and may also be posted on the instructor's office door. You can make an appointment before or after class, or you can call the instructor's office. Be sure to show up on time (or call beforehand to reschedule). Arrive with a goal. Maybe you'd like your instructor to clarify a comment she wrote on your English composition. Or you'd like suggestions for how to better prepare for your next math test. Another important reason to meet with your instructors is to establish a friendly relationship and make yourself more than just a name on a course roster. Building such relationships will go a long way to help if you ever need special assistance.
7. **Know the importance of your grade point average (GPA).** Your GPA is the average grade for all of the courses you have taken in college. At most colleges, GPAs range from 0.0 ("F") to 4.0 ("A"). Your GPA affects your future in many ways. At most colleges, a minimum GPA (often 2.0, a "C") is required to graduate, regardless of how many credits you have earned. Students who fall below the minimum GPA may be placed on probation and are usually ineligible for financial aid and cannot play intercollegiate sports. Students with very low GPAs are in danger of academic dismissal. Academic honors (such as the dean's list) and some scholarships are based