

LIFE MANAGEMENT

**What's Your
A7MQ?**



Rozalia Williams, Ed.D.

Life Management: What's Your A7MQ?

By Rozalia Williams, Ed.D.

Life Management

What's Your A7MQ?

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This book emerged from my own experience as a 16-year-old college freshman and over four decades of counseling students, implementing college student development programs, teaching first-year experience courses, and serving as a college administrator. Throughout the years, I watched students who had “everything going for them” leave college without earning a credential, and I watched students who were the “least expected to succeed” walk across the stage. Some who left without a degree flourished in the workplace, and some who graduated struggled in the workplace.

Curious about what could explain this variance in educational and aspirational attainment, graduate school research and my experience in precollege community outreach programs led me to the literature on the evaluation of school and college partnership programs. While program evaluations showed positive postsecondary outcomes, unfortunately, evaluators could not determine whether the results were a function of the program itself, the student who participated, or other external factors that had nothing to do with the program. In the absence of randomly assigning students in and out of a program, it is difficult for evaluators to understand how the program’s activities lead to changes in the program’s outcomes.

To improve traditional methods-based evaluation designs, I conducted theory-based evaluation research on how precollege programs are intended to work. After reviewing the literature on social program evaluation, reviewing documents, observing, and interviewing program stakeholders, I opened the “black box” of a statewide precollege program in search of the underlying causal mechanisms that explain how changes in program participants are logically brought about.

Merging my evaluation research with my professional practice, I posit that variance in aspirational attainment can logically be explained by changes in one’s self-knowledge, self-discipline, and, in the education segment of life, college knowledge. Accordingly, students who *enter* higher education with the *foresight*, *drive*, and *capacity* to *concentrate* their energy, *design* a strategic plan, *predict* plausible obstacles, and *respond* wisely attain their aspirations. These mechanisms, which link pre-exposure to college knowledge with educational attainment, form the conceptual framework used herein to teach students how to answer seven major questions (A7MQ) that enable them to manage their *whole* lives.

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, the A7MQ Life Management framework is a macro-septivium (meaning where seven roads meet) of what it takes to attain one’s aspirations. It is a modification and expansion of the classic liberal arts septivium grounded in the origins of higher learning in ancient Egypt that influenced the European system of higher education during the Middle Ages. The classic or micro-septivium is comprised of the academic subjects once considered essential for a “liberated” or free male to function as a well-rounded member of society. Three academic subjects called the *trivium* are related to the use of *letters* and include grammar, rhetoric, and logic.

Four academic subjects called the *quadrivium* are related to the use of *numbers* and include arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Combined they form the seven *artes liberales* (liberal or freedom arts) that migrated to America and preceded the core or general education curriculum that today's high schools and colleges require students to complete before graduating or moving into their major fields of study.

In contrast to the emphasis placed solely on academic subject matter, the art and science of the A7MQ septivium is holistic. It is comprised of the mechanisms *all* students must learn to use in *all* segments of their lives to be free. It makes no distinction between those who intend to contribute to society through the study of the liberal arts and those who intend to contribute to society through the study of the *artes mechanicae* (mechanical or servile arts); and the A7MQ septivium covers the personal, interpersonal, career, financial, environmental, educational, and spiritual segments of life.

To convey the relevance of higher education to aspirational attainment, the septivium is applied to the educational segment of life. As shown in Figure 2, embedded

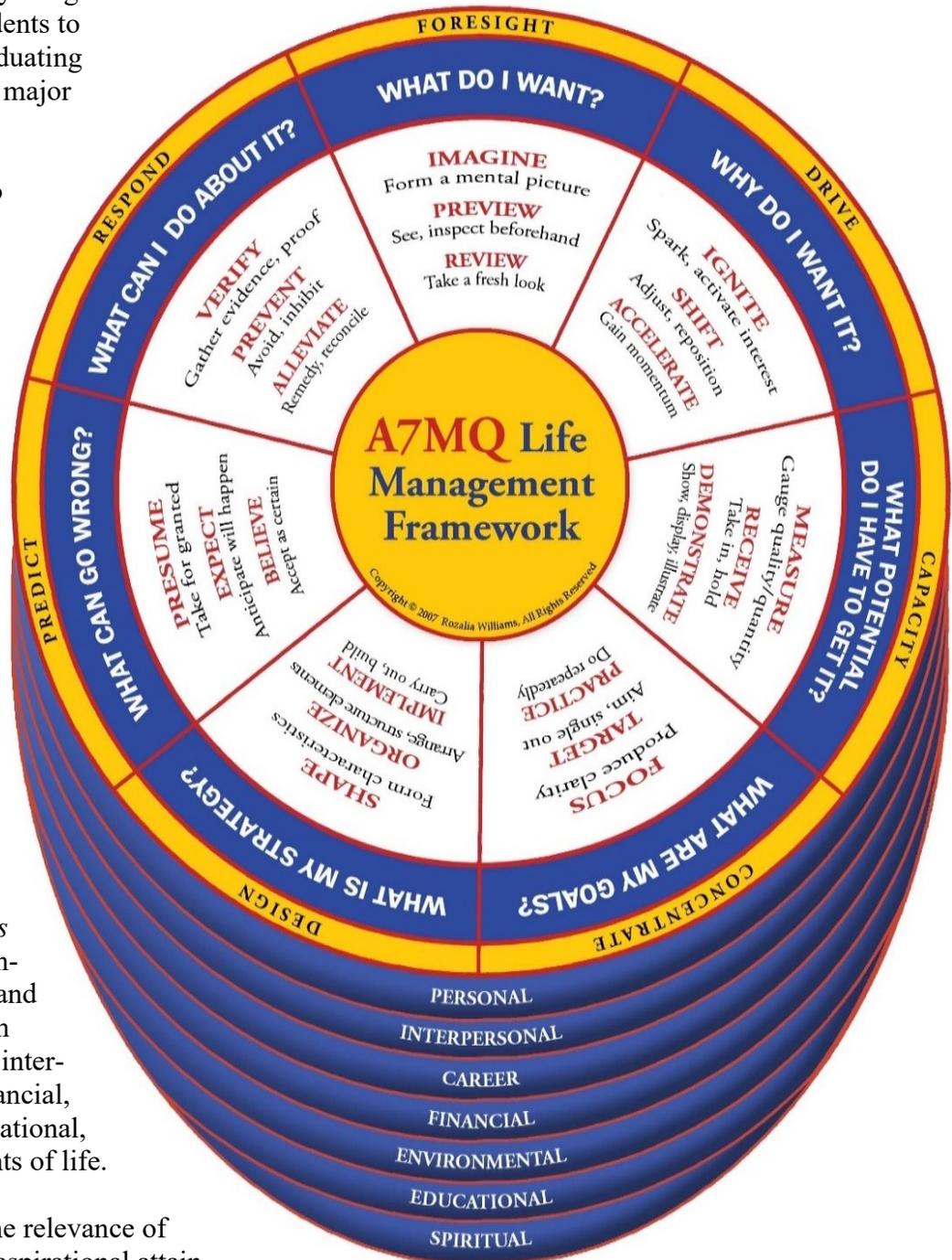


Figure 1. A7MQ Framework specifying the life management mechanisms that lead to intended aspirational attainment in multiple segments of life.

in the A7MQ College Life Management *micro-septivium* are the precollege, matriculation, and graduation expectations of virtually every college official, hiring official, and military recruiter for the self-knowledge, self-discipline, and college knowledge a student must *bring* to campus or the workplace if they desire to earn a credential and become employed. Unfortunately, most high school students are not aware that these expectations even exist. Nor are they aware of how to meet them—until now.

Rozalia Williams

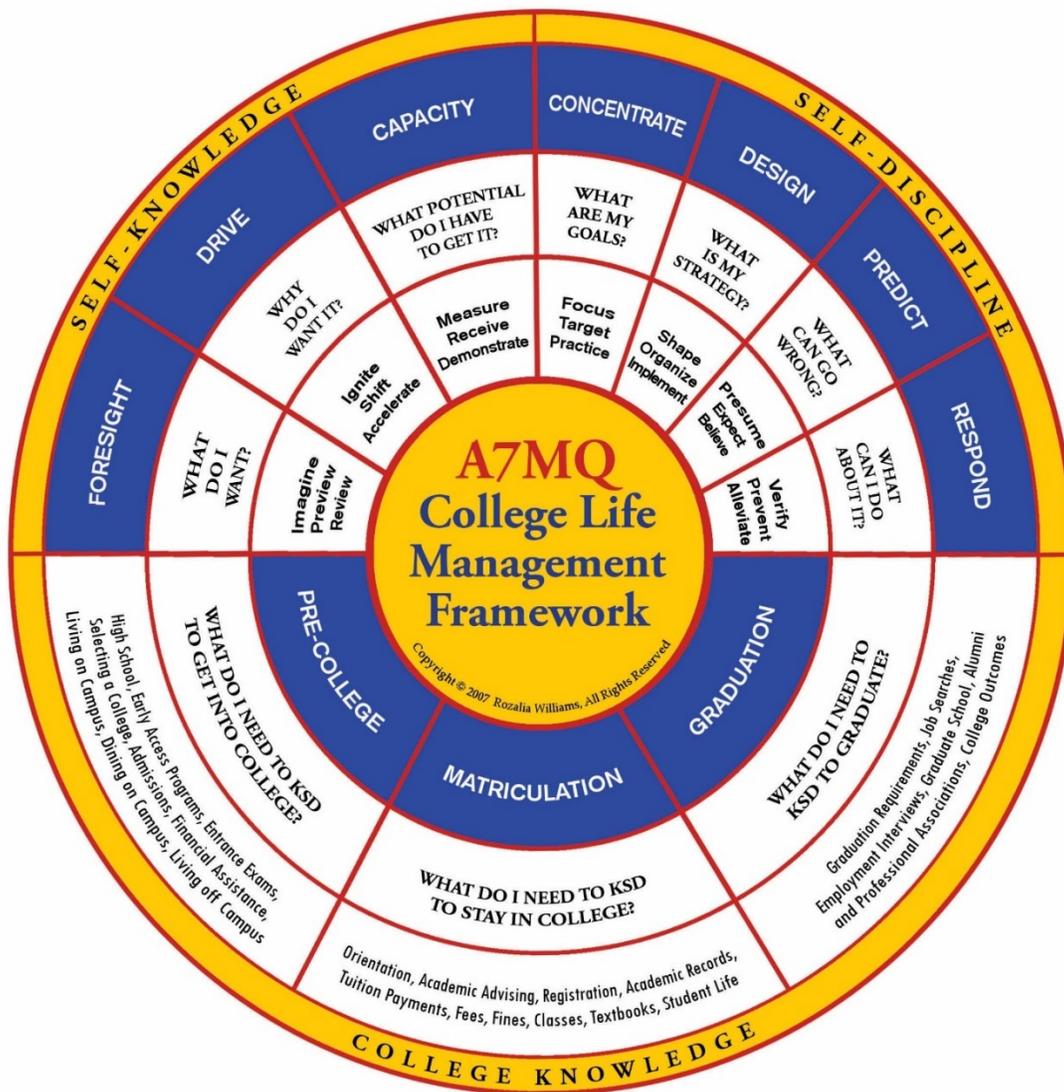


Figure 2. A7MQ Framework specifying the life management mechanisms that lead to intended aspirational attainment in the education segment of life.

Rites of passage and other formal instruction that prepares youth to transition from adolescence to adulthood has existed throughout the history of civilization. In ancient Africa and Asia, higher learning was initially designed to prepare youth to fulfill their obligations to the collective or otherwise contribute to the greater good of the group. After centuries of global exchanges among and across communities of scholars, the medieval European model of autonomous higher learning evolved into what we know today as individualistic higher education.



Purpose of the Book

The purpose of this book is two-fold. One, to prepare you and your peers for what you will all have in common regardless of what you decide to do or have an opportunity to do immediately after high school. That is, when you leave high school and enter society you will be treated like adults and expected to act like adults — even though you are still teenagers. And two, to increase your awareness of the relevance of higher education to the attainment of your aspirations.

This book is different from other books written about life after high school. First, it teaches you how to answer seven major questions (A7MQ) that will prepare you to manage your life on your own terms and at your own pace. Second, it takes the mystery out of what is required to function as

an adult in the “real world.” It is not the type of book you read from cover to cover and move on to the next book. It is a workbook, and the hardest work you will ever do is work on yourself.

Life Management: What’s Your A7MQ? does not prepare you to transition from one site (a high school) to another site (a college). It prepares you to transition from one stage of human development (a dependent adolescent) to another stage of human development (an independent adult). It is written for the student who is eager to become independent, the student who is reluctant to live on their own, and the student who has no other choice. It will also benefit the student who has not given adult life much thought at all, or is unfamiliar with how to prepare for the experience.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized into three parts and covers seven life management mechanisms that lead to aspirational attainment. Mechanisms are separate devices with separate functions that, when combined or assembled sequentially with other devices, work together to immediately and/or continuously cause something to happen, cause something to move, something to get done, or something to be brought into existence. The seven life management mechanisms are **foresight, drive, capacity, concentrate, design, predict, and respond**. **Part One** is the *trivium* or three roads that lead to self-knowledge through the foresight, drive, and capacity mechanisms. **Part Two** is the *quadrivium* or four roads that lead to self-discipline through the concentrate, design, predict, and respond mechanisms. **Part Three** combines the self-knowledge and self-discipline mechanisms to form a *microseptivium* or seven roads that lead to the attainment of your educational aspirations.

Part One—Self-Knowledge: Chapters 1–3 introduce you to the trivium and enable you to answer three major questions to discover what you want out of life, why you want it, and what potential you have to get it—today. In chapter one, you answer the question, *what do I want?* You will develop a clear picture of your ideal future by engaging in a mental planning process that defines the characteristics of the *personal, interpersonal, career, financial, environmental, educational, and spiritual* segments of your life as a fully functioning and autonomous adult. In chapter two, you answer the question, *why do I want it?* You will identify and prioritize your motivating drives, examine the relationship between your driving forces and your foreseeable future, and determine what compels you to act. In chapter three, you answer the question, *what potential do I have to get it?* You will take inventory of what you

currently know, say, and do well and what you need to learn or enhance in each segment of your life. The results of your inventory will be used to acknowledge your strengths, examine any unrealistic perceptions you have about your capacity to make your foreseeable future a reality, and set goals.

Part Two—Self-Discipline: Chapters 4–7 introduce you to the quadrivium and enable you to answer four major questions about your goals, your strategy, your predictions about the obstacles you may encounter along the way, and how you think they can be overcome. In chapter four, you answer the question, *what are my goals?* You will concentrate on writing *acquisition, experience, improvement, observation, and utilization* (AEIOU) goals that are aligned with your foreseeable future in each segment of your life. In chapter five, you answer the question, *what is my strategy?* You will design a plan of action for achieving your goals by engaging in a physical planning process that structures your *energy, time, space, human resources, and material resources*. In chapter six, you answer the question, *what can go wrong?* You will predict and prioritize the obstacles you believe will interfere with the implementation of your plan. In chapter seven, you answer the question, *what can I do about it?* You will be taught how to prepare in advance for the obstacles you predict you will encounter on your path, and brainstorm options for overcoming them to implement your plan.

Part Three—College Knowledge: Most high school students express interest in participating in some form of postsecondary education after graduation but typically do not have an in-depth understanding of how college works. As a result, defining what it means to go to college can be confusing to students who hear the word used in so many

different contexts it is difficult to distinguish one definition from another. For example, the term is used to describe “kiddie colleges,” and “college preparatory” schools. Some countries use the term “college” to describe a level of education in their systems that other countries use to describe “high school.” The term describes the Electoral College which elects the president and the College of Cardinals which elects the Pope. Businesses use the term to describe the employer-based training offered in their “corporate colleges” or “corporate universities.” Some institutions are described as “junior” colleges and “university” colleges, and it’s also possible for separate “schools” and “colleges” to exist within single universities. Prior to introducing you to chapters 8-15, it is important that you have a basic understanding of the terminology and concepts used in the field of higher education.

Literally, the term *college* is derived from the Latin *collegium*, which is a corporate entity. A corporation can be a business, organization, association, society, guild, congregation, brotherhood, or sisterhood. Corporations are purposely formed for living, dwelling, or coming together to perform special activities or duties under a common set of rules and standards, or a penalty is imposed. The authority to establish colleges comes from national, state, and local governments which grant or recognize corporate existence. There is no law prohibiting a corporation from adding the words college or university to its legal name.

Technically, all legitimate paths after high school lead to affiliation with some type of corporation, whether it is a privately owned business, a national service agency, or a career, technical, military, community, or liberal arts college or university. However, the most prevalent interpretation of what it means to go to college refers to being affiliated with corporate entities authorized to offer credit-bearing courses of instruction

leading to a credential. The terms *credit* and *credential* are derived from the Latin *credere* which means to confirm, corroborate, acknowledge, or document a belief, faith, or trust that an individual is “credible” or “credit-worthy.” The term *course* is derived from the root word *currere* which means “to run” or move along a fixed path, track, or curriculum over a period of time. Thousands of colleges, businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies are authorized to offer credit-bearing courses of instruction and award credentials.

The credentials most frequently awarded to students who successfully complete courses of study are diplomas, certificates, and degrees. **Diplomas** are awarded to students who have successfully completed a formal instructional program before reaching the compulsory or legal age for high school to end. **Certificates** are awarded to students who have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent and successfully completed an occupational education program requiring less than two years of study. **Degrees** are awarded to students who have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent and successfully completed an occupational or academic education program requiring two or more years of study. Credits earned toward a certificate may be applied toward earning a degree.

The objective of seeking any credential is to prepare the mind to work with matter. Academic and occupational programs of study are two sides of the same coin. Earning a credential is not a matter of *either* preparing the mind *or* working with matter. It is both, and employers want both. The primary difference between occupational and academic programs is that the curriculum is inverted. In occupational programs, students normally work directly with matter or are “hands-on” at the beginning of their courses or apprenticeships. In academic programs,

students normally work directly with matter or are “hands-on” near the end of their courses or internship. The life and learning skills required to graduate are the same. To demonstrate that you are competent, you must perform mental work *and* you must perform manual work. After a thorough self-examination, the only person who can determine which program of study is best for you is you.



“...and to prepare you for life after graduation, ‘Walking Without A Backpack 101.’”

Chapters 8–15 teach you how to apply the A7MQ septivium to the education segment of life, specifically the precollege, matriculation, and graduation stages of the college experience. In chapter eight, you answer the question, *what do I want from the college experience?* You will define your perception of the ideal college experience in each of the seven segments of life. In chapter nine, you answer the question, *why do I want a college credential?* You will identify and prioritize the most important reasons you want to earn a college credential. In chapter ten, you answer the question, *what potential do I have to earn a college credential?* You

will take inventory of your capacity to enter college and persist through graduation while simultaneously complying with the institution’s policies and procedures. In chapter eleven, you will compile a precollege portfolio using onsite or online college resources to set goals and design a plan for *getting into* college. Topics covered include high school graduation, career exploration, entrance exams, college searches, essays, admissions applications, financial assistance, housing, and transportation. In chapter twelve, you will compile a matriculation portfolio using onsite or online resources to set goals and design a plan for *staying in* college. Topics covered include life outside of the classroom, orientation, academic advising, enrollment, educational materials, and college classes. In chapter thirteen, you will compile a graduation portfolio using onsite or online college resources to set goals and design a plan for *getting out* of college. Topics covered include declaring an official academic major, competency and professional exams, graduation applications, graduate and professional school applications, employment applications, employment interviews, commencement exercises, and professional association memberships. In chapter fourteen, you answer the question, *what can go wrong in college?* You will predict the obstacles you believe will influence you to abandon your strategic plan and leave college without a credential. In chapter fifteen, you answer the question, *what can I do about college obstacles?* You will be taught how to brainstorm responses to the obstacles you predicted you would encounter on your path, and be introduced to the college support services available to help you implement your plan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rozalia Williams earned an Ed.D. in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education; and an M.S. in Counselor Education from Florida International University. She has over four decades of experience counseling and educating high school and college students; creating, implementing, and evaluating student development programs; and teaching first-year experience courses. Dr. Williams served as an Exchange Scholar and Peer Reviewer at the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Higher Education Programs. She is the Founder and President of the College Student Development Center where she teaches the College Life Skills Course[®] that was reviewed and recommended for college credit by the American Council on Education; she implements the GottaDo College[®] Early Awareness Initiative; and she uses the A7MQ[®] Life Management framework to teach practitioners *How to Counsel College- and Corporate-bound Students* in a professional development training approved by the National Board for Certified Counselors for NBCC continuing education credit. Dr. Williams is the author of the *College FAQ Book: Over 5,000 Not Frequently Asked Questions About College!* She invented the A7MQ[®] Life Management Wheel, and the *What's Your A7MQubes?*