
Jordan Williams on Overcoming Challenges and Choosing Your Own Path

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Jordan Williams, 21, is a senior at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. While sophomores in high school in Atlanta, Georgia, Williams and his friend founded the Young Moguls Brand, an urban clothing line that promotes entrepreneurship. Williams' venture inspired his journey to Wharton, where he has learned so much about business, vulnerability, and his strength as a quiet leader.

Knowledge@Wharton High School: Hi, I'm Effie Zhou with the Wharton Global Youth Program. I'm excited to welcome Jordan Williams to the Knowledge@Wharton High School studio today. Jordan, a senior here at Wharton, has been on the move since he started his first business at age 10. In his high school in Atlanta, Georgia, he co-founded Young Moguls Brand, an urban clothing line that promotes entrepreneurship. Most recently, he published his third book, *Breaking the System: Unlocking Your Limitless Potential*. We're going to talk all about this, and more. Thank you for joining us.

Jordan Williams: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

KWHS: Sure. I'd love to know more about the Young Moguls Brand. What motivated you to start the company, particularly with a connection to entrepreneurship? And did that influence your decision to come to Wharton to study business?

Williams: Absolutely. So initially, we started this brand — and when I say “we,” myself and my best friend from back home in Atlanta. His name is Brandon Iverson. He goes to Georgetown now. But we started this brand when we were in high school, actually, our sophomore year. And we really just wanted to create our own brand with our own designs, but we knew that we wanted it to promote a positive message, as well.

And for us, the message that we thought we had on our minds to share was a message that promoted entrepreneurship, that inspired our peers and our friends to identify whatever their passion was and find out how they could use that passion in their communities to provide value and also create opportunities for themselves.

So, we started it that year in high school, and we've been running it ever since. And I think that coming into my senior year of high school and looking for colleges, it definitely did influence my interest in Wharton. Because of my experience with running the clothing line, I knew I was very interested in entrepreneurship, and I was looking for a school where I felt like my academics would complement the work that I was doing outside of the classroom, as well. And I thought Wharton was a great place to learn and grow academically but also have the opportunity to pursue

entrepreneurial stuff and push the business forward.

KWHS: Great. Bring us up to date. How successful is the brand today? Have you had any bumps in the road? What new knowledge have you used to sustain and grow your business?

Williams: Yes, so the business has been doing great since we started, and it has definitely grown a lot since our time in high school. Right before I came to Penn, actually, we had a really great opportunity to be featured on *The Steve Harvey Show*, and so that was a great opportunity that took the national awareness of the brand to a new level. We weren't just getting orders from people in Georgia anymore, but getting orders from people in different states and getting to spread the message further.

And that's been great, and there's been a lot of growth along the way. There's definitely been a lot of challenges. I think the biggest challenge is probably Brandon and I both going to schools in different areas. He goes to school in D.C., and I'm here in Philadelphia. I think it just calls for us to have to step up our level of communication, having to be more organized because we're both on different schedules now at this point. But I think the thing I'm most proud of is that we haven't let that challenge stop us, and we've still been able to put out some new projects and still do the thing that we're passionate about. So, I'm excited to see where it goes in the future, as well.

“Don't be afraid to go up to someone else and introduce yourself. Even though it might be awkward or it might be vulnerable...a lot of times great things and great relationships come from it.” — Jordan Williams

KWHS: Very cool. You've self-published the book *Breaking the System: Unlocking Your Limitless Potential*. What prompted you to write it?

Williams: This is a book I published pretty recently, actually — last semester, in the fall. And I think that the prompt to write the book was a lot from personal experience, mainly from my junior year here at Penn and at Wharton. I would say that my junior year was a year that was a little difficult for me. I was sort of trying to work out a lot of things as far as finding out where I wanted to take my career in the future, what types of things I was interested in, and trying to understand how to find my own unique path, whether or not that was the path that's popular here at Wharton or at Penn.

So, when I went home over break, I had a lot of different conversations with friends who were going through the same types of thought processes and were considering the same challenges. Going into that next semester for junior year, I approached *Breaking the System* as a way to use writing and journaling as a way to have a little bit of a therapeutic experience and work through some of the concepts. And it ended up being a project that was not only beneficial for me, but also something that I think could be a good resource for other people in a variety of different systems — whether it's a school system or a corporate environment or a family system — just to help them really understand how they can find their unique passion and not be afraid to challenge systems in order to make it better eventually, as well. It has been a great experience.

KWHS: How can young people find their true passions and push against societal norms of success to make a change in the world?

Williams: I think that's a great question. I think it's a very difficult task, and I've been finding that as I'm in this stage of my life, where I'm in my senior year this year and looking for opportunities after graduation — and I think that coming to Penn and coming to Wharton, specifically — it was an experience where I sort of had to find my identity in a way and find my own unique interests. And at times, I think it was hard, because the first thought is to just go along with the crowd to do the same career interests that everyone says are the best or that pay the most money.

I think for me, I went along the path of just going along with what everybody said for a while, but I think the important thing is being able to be honest with yourself if you find out that it's not for you. And also being fearless enough to try different things, as well — whether it's trying different classes, trying different internships, or even just being willing to contact people to learn a little bit about what they do, if it's different from the professions that you're familiar with.

That's what I've appreciated here at Wharton — that I've had the opportunity to try my hand at a lot of different things. And now I feel like I'm in a good place going forward, where I know what my interests are that I want to pursue in the future.

KWHS: So, what are you going to pursue in the future? You're graduating this spring, right?

Williams: Yes.

KWHS: What's next for you?

Williams: Yes, so I am graduating in May, and I'm going back home to Atlanta after graduation, which I'm very excited for. Actually, I just found out that I'll be doing a private wealth management program at SunTrust Bank, which is now known as Truist Bank. So, I'll be back in Atlanta doing that.

I'm also very excited to be continuing to grow entrepreneurial ventures like the Young Moguls Brand. I also work with a nonprofit called the Youth Entrepreneurs Diversity Corporation. We do a lot of different events for college students who are interested in entrepreneurship, to connect them with each other, to give them resources, and to connect them with mentors. I'm excited to continue working with that organization and put on some really great events this summer, as well.

KWHS: Very cool. I saw you described somewhere as a “quiet leader.” Would you agree with that description? Can you both be quiet and a leader?

Williams: I think I agree with that description in some ways. I think it depends on the environment I'm in, and I like to pride myself on being able to know the best way to respond in the environment I'm in. So sometimes if it's an environment I'm very comfortable in with close friends, I might take a more vocal position if it's something that I think I'm very familiar with or knowledgeable about. And in some other situations, I think it's better to be a more — not necessarily “quiet,” but to be a better listener, to be more observant, and sometimes to even lead more by example, rather than just talking a lot and being more vocal. But I definitely put an emphasis more on being focused on results and actions, rather than just focused on being the loudest in the room.

KWHS: Aside from your published insights, what have you learned in your college journey that you think can help guide younger students as they plan their lives and careers?

Williams: I've learned a lot of lessons over the four years — some learned the easy way, some learned the hard way. But I think the biggest one has been not being afraid to be vulnerable and to get out of my comfort zone, especially with meeting new people on campus. And that was hard for me really the first three years of college, coming from outside of the state of Pennsylvania and not really knowing any people at Penn and not being very familiar with the territory. I think once I made a few friends, it was very easy for me to just want to hang around them all the time and to sort of stay in that same clique.

And now that I'm getting closer to graduation, I think as I'm getting more sentimental, I've realized how many talented people are actually on this campus, undergrad and on the graduate level. I think it's a really unique experience to be able to tap into all of these different relationships and all of the unique experiences these people have had while you're here

and utilizing that before it's too late.

My advice to other people would be to not be afraid to go up to someone else and introduce yourself. And even though it might be awkward or it might be vulnerable, I think that a lot of times great things and great relationships come from it when you're just willing to put your ego aside for a little bit and get to know someone else who does something different than what you do.

KWHS: Jordan, thank you for joining us today.

Williams: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.