Jim Thompson  
Executive Vice President, Engineering  
Qualcomm Technologies, Inc.

What is your favorite Madison/campus memory?  
The sports! The teams weren’t that great at that time, but I loved being in the student section at football games with a group of friends that I still see to this day.

What has helped you achieve success in your career?  
Being in a fraternity at UW helped me learn team dynamics early, and also how to work together and lead.

Outside of class, what experiences did you find most meaningful?  
I truly enjoyed the athletic components of UW and being in the fraternity.

What excites you about the future of Engineering?  
When I graduated from high school, I thought everything had already been invented. I thought my father’s generation was so awesome and had already discovered it all. After college I learned that there is always a product or service that can be improved. There are all sorts of new things being created every single day. We are in a time where we have the ability to create new devices quickly that impact the entire world.

Besides engineering, do you have another passion you have pursued or would have liked to pursue given the time?  
History and Economics. I have always been fascinated by why it is people do what they do from an economics viewpoint. Regarding history, I love learning about western cultures like Rome, Greece, and our own culture.

Who was an influential peer/professor from your time at UW-Madison?  
When I first began my engineering courses, I received a D on my first exam. I hadn’t even come close to finishing the exam. Afterwards, I spoke with an Associate Dean about continuing in the major and thankfully he encouraged me to continue through the end of the semester. After that meeting, I started asking my fellow classmates what they thought of the exam, and this is when I learned that all the other students had an HP15C calculator that did complex math. It was then that the world completely changed for me.

What are you most proud of in life? What is your greatest achievement?  
When I was a kid I was a horrible student. I specifically remember in 6th grade that I needed to change my attitude and worked hard to make those changes.

What would be your advice to current students? What do you wish you had known?  
Learn the fundamentals. These will allow you work in any industry or career you choose. Also, it is not all about you and it is wise to invest some of your time and energy into others.