

# Neil Theobald

My dad, and his father before him, worked at the Caterpillar Tractor factory in Peoria, Illinois. In the fall of my senior year in high school, I secured a spot in the factory's electrician's apprentice program. That was going to be my life.

But one person – one guidance counselor – saw a different path for me. He arranged for me to take the SAT. He found a scholarship for me that made college possible. I became the first person in my family to attend college and it changed my life beyond imagination.

After finishing college, I returned to work at Caterpillar. A couple years later, though, Cat announced it was ceasing tractor production in the U.S. and moving those jobs to Mexico and China. The fact that I had a college degree gave me options during and after the closure . . . options that were simply unavailable to my 100s of classmates who found themselves trained as spot welders in an era of robotics.

I decided to return to school and earn a PhD. As a result, over the last 35 years, I've had the honor of assisting thousands of students to complete a certificate or a degree program. My focus on educational attainment led me to the UW, a university I've known and loved going back more than three decades.