

GHC 2023: A Day to Day Journal

~ Written By: Kaitlynn ~

I am extremely grateful that I got the chance to attend the Grace Hopper Celebration (GHC) in 2023. With over 30,000 attendees, it was an overwhelming but amazing experience. There were some highs and lows that came out of this event but I hope for the years to come, GHC will be a fulfilling experience for future attendees.

Day 1 - Badge Pickup

The first day was a pretty relaxed day, there weren't too many things scheduled for the day so we were free to arrive at any time. Since we had time, we got some breakfast at the hotel's food court and printed copies of our resumes. Once we were ready to go, we waited at the designated area for the complementary conference shuttle. However, since we were the last stop, the shuttle would fill up before it even got to us so during busy hours we had to wait a while.

Once we got to the Orange County Center, it was quite an exciting experience. Everything was decorated, there was a DJ playing bangers, and it felt good to see so many females in tech. The first thing we had to do was pickup our badges. Although there were a lot of people, the system they had was very efficient so the line went quite quickly. After that, there were various activities throughout the day we explored.

I particularly liked the Career Fair because I got the chance to meet other attendees and industry professionals. However, it was then when it became apparent that quite a few males were in attendance and their intentions were obvious. Additionally, many people discovered that company reps had qr code links to sign up for exclusive events which quickly became a zoo. Hoards of people would crowd someone, even if they were not reps, with their phones out ready to scan a qr code if they had one.

The Expo preview opened at 4:30pm. Many people started lining up hours before to be the first ones to talk to the companies. Since there weren't any food options available the first day, we decided to go to a nearby plaza, eat an early dinner and come back to visit the Expo before it closed.

We ended up making it back just in time before the Expo closed for the day and were amazed. The company booths looked incredible and had a lot of merch. There were a handful people but it was not as busy as it would get in the days to come.

Day 1 was a day filled with excitement and was a good start to the week.



Day 2 - Opening Day and Expo

Day 2 was the official start of the conference. In the morning, Cigna hosted a breakfast to allow attendees to network with the company and potentially try out their product. It was a great chance to chat with the team members and get to know the company in a more intimate setting.

Following breakfast, I spent most of the day at the Expo. It felt like an almost completely different experience as the day before. It was overwhelming with how many people and companies there were. Most booths had long line ups. When I did talk to company reps, I had my resumes printed and ready to give if they requested it, but many companies had qr code links specifically for GHC attendees to upload their resume. Unfortunately, due to the situation at the time many US companies were unable to support funding international students.

Taking a break from the booths, we attended the Open Plenary at 11am. Multiple accomplished women gave empowering speeches and the GHC President came to officially kick off the Grace Hopper Celebration.

For lunch, we tried out the various food stands placed around. It was not the best deal for what I got, so over the next few days I got some cheaper food from the hotel and brought it to the conference for lunch.

At the end of day 2, I was very exhausted.



Day 3

I spent day 3 attending the workshops and sessions. I really enjoyed the cryptography workshop. We were assigned groups to solve a series of puzzles. Some of the puzzles required technical expertise to solve and some were physical. We were given different objects and had to use them together to find the answer. I had a lot of fun solving the puzzles and meeting new people.

In between the workshops and talks, I snacked on some of the treats they had out in the venues. Day 3 was more relaxed and was a nice break day.



Day 4 - The Last Day

On the last day, the Expo was only open for a short amount of time so I spent my day visiting the last companies I didn't get the chance to talk to. In the end, I wasn't able to get to all of them but I finished off by completing the Disney passport challenge to win prizes. I think that was one of the top most engaging booths. Part of the challenges required chatting with multiple Disney employees which provided good conversation starters.

When the Expo eventually closed, we were shoed out by security to make sure we left and got to the Closing Plenary on time. During this ceremony, GHC addressed the challenges and frustration female attendees faced from the aggressive and rude behaviors of the male attendees over the week. The conference then closed with a final panel of women doing great things and a speech by the president. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen weather, our closing speaker was unable to finish it off with a bang.

To wrap up the event, the Grace Hopper Celebration was quite overwhelming but it was filled with fun activities, merch, and inspiring females. I also enjoyed traveling and bonding with an amazing group of girls from SFU.

