

Newcomb Institute provides Grace Hopper Celebration travel grants for thirteen computer science students

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Tulane students Wendy Yang, Sam Demarinis, Ifeoma Osakwe, Kailen Mitchell, Maddie Wisinski, and Yuxin (Kyra) Zhu at the Grace Hopper '23 Celebration.

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On Tuesday, Sept. 26, nine Tulane students flew to Orlando, Florida to attend three days of the Grace Hopper Celebration (GHC '23); a celebration that prioritizes the research and career interests of women in computer sciences.

The opportunity was provided to thirteen students, with nine attending in-person and four attending virtually, through Newcomb Institute's Grace Hopper Celebration Travel Grant. The grant was coordinated by Dr. Jacquelyne Thoni Howard when she was an Administrative Professor at Newcomb Institute. Howard is now a Professor of Practice at Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science and the program continues under Aaliyah Randall, the Technology and Facilities Coordinator at the Newcomb Institute.

The grant was established in order to promote leadership skills and uplift undergraduates with an interest in information technology, providing female-identifying, non-binary, and male-identifying allied students with a chance to network, learn, and expand their careers in an environment that may not have previously been accessible.

Grace Hopper, born in 1906, was a mathematician and a trailblazer in computer sciences. Hopper became [one of the first women to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics](#), graduating from Yale in 1934. After being assigned to the Bureau of Ships Computation Project at Harvard University, Hopper became one of the [first three programmers on the MARK I](#), America's first electromechanical computer, in addition to writing its' [561-page user manual](#). Hopper went on to work on the MARK II and III, as well as pioneering automatic programming, introducing words to programs rather than strictly symbols, serving as a reservist and a rear-admiral in the Navy, and, after her passing in 1992, she was awarded the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) as well as countless scholarships, professorships, conferences, and awards named in her honor.

The Grace Hopper Celebration, created in 1994 and hosted by AnitaB.org, honors the legacy of Admiral Grace Hopper and prioritizes the studies of women in computing. Yearly, [11 to 30,000 attendees](#) participate in the celebration, engaging in activities such as attending career fairs, one-on-one meetings, keynote sessions, panels, and workshops.

"It was started in order to reduce the gender gap in the technology industry," Howard said.

Since 2015, the Grace Hopper Celebration has [reported](#) a 97 to 83 percent female attendance rate.

“The technology industry is extremely hierarchical and exclusive. So it's important to have spaces where we can look at equity as an issue, whether that's gender equity, racial equity, [or] equity around LGBTQ communities so that we can focus on how to provide more access to the technology field for everybody,” Howard said.

At the Grace Hopper Celebration, students and tech-industry professionals are able to come together to network, learn about major and up-and-coming technology companies, and attend breakout sessions, receptions, speeches, lectures, and career fairs and expos.

Izzy Blair, who hadn't heard about the Grace Hopper Celebration until this year, says the part of the conference that they enjoyed the most were the LGBTQIA+ related events, such as lectures that focused on being non-binary in the tech field and LGBTQIA+ networking events.

Blair also spoke about their experience in attending company events, “I went to this...[networking] event for [the] Northrop Grumman company...because I had just interviewed with them. It was really cool to talk to women at such a large tech company,” Blair said.



Sam DeMarinis posing with the Duolingo mascot.

Wendy Yang, who attended GHC '23 as a peer mentor this year, said she enjoyed attending the speeches at the celebration, "It's really cool to see a lot of females as role models. I personally want to be a project manager, so I attended one of the keynote speeches for that and that was really beneficial," Yang said.

Yang's favorite part of the convention was the Career Fair & Expo, though, "That's a huge part of Grace Hopper," Yang said.

The Grace Hopper Celebration works with [over 260](#) sponsors and patrons including tech giants such as Amazon, Google, Apple, Microsoft and Disney.

“Being able to attend the job fair and see the different types of jobs that are out there, but also the different companies that are making a commitment to equity, is extremely important and eye-opening,” Howard said.

Additionally, the Grace Hopper Celebration hosts hundreds of sessions every year that include topics such as career conversations, meet-and-greets, and ‘level-up labs’.

“These sessions don't just focus on entering the job field, but they focus on people's experiences from the time they enter to the time that they leave,” Howard said.

Applications for Tulane’s 2024 Grace Hopper Celebration Travel Grant open up on WaveSync, Tulane’s event scheduling system, in January and close around mid-March. Applicants will find out if they were accepted for the grant in April.

The application requires applicants to complete a questionnaire as well as an essay about why they would like to attend a conference that focuses on equity.

Applications are open to all students who have an interest in the technology industry and gender equity, though applications do preference juniors and seniors.

“I always say every major is a tech major, every major is a data major, a student should apply if they’re interested in entering the tech industry,” Howard said.

Howard encourages students to engage with the conference in other ways as well, “They can prepare by thinking deeply about what equity means in technology and ... why we still need to focus on equity in these fields,” Howard said.



Abby Scarry and Sydney Feldman posing in front of the Grace Hopper Celebration banner.

Aaliyah Randall, the Technology and Facilities Coordinator at the Newcomb Institute, emphasizes the importance of preparing for the conference, “It's really big that we have students print out [about] 15 resumes to take with them to the conference, work on their elevator pitches, [and just get] comfortable going up to people and putting yourself out there,” Randall said.

“Find that one thing about yourself that you feel makes you stand out. Because, you know, you really want to sell yourself while you're at these conferences,” Randall said.

Blair talks about the benefits of going to the Grace Hopper Celebration, “I got like 100 new LinkedIn connections,” Blair said.

The Grace Hopper celebration remains the largest gathering of women and non-binary technologists in the world.

“There's no space in the world, anywhere, where women and non-binary people have precedents to get these jobs except for Grace Hopper,” Blair said.