Grace Hopper's Celebration of Women in Computing: 'Making Waves'
San Diego, California
4-7th October 2006

Visit Report by Reena Pau, Learning Technologies Group and BCSWomen Committee Member.
**Introduction to the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing**

The Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing 2006, is the sixth in the series of conferences designed to bring together the research and career interests of women in computing to the forefront of their careers. The conference is different from others in that it not only allows leading women to present their research, but it also has special sessions that focus on the role of women in today’s technology fields.

It was co-founded by Dr. Anita Borg and Dr. Telle Whitney in 1994 and was inspired by the legacy of Admiral Grace Murray Hopper. It is the largest technical conference for women in computing. The conference brings together collaborations, networking and mentoring for junior women and increases visibility for the contributions of women in computing. Each year the conference has a theme, this year's theme is: 'Making Waves'.

**Who was Rear Admiral Grace Murray Hopper (December 9, 1906 – January 1, 1992)?**

"It's easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission."

Rear Admiral Grace Murray Hopper was an American Computer scientist and naval officer. She was a pioneer in computer science (even pioneer would not do justice to what she has done) and she was the first programmer of the Mark I Calculator; she developed the first compiler for a computer programming language.

While working in a Mark II Computer at Harvard University, her associates discovered a moth stuck in a relay and thereby impeding operation, where she said that they were 'debugging' the system. Although the term was not totally attributed to Grace Hopper, she did make the term popular.

**Who was Dr. Anita Borg?**

Anita Borg was a member of the research staff and Xerox's Palo Alto research centre. She was also president and founding director of the Institute for Women and Technology, a nonprofit organisation focused on increasing women's impact on technology on women worldwide.

After receiving her PhD from New York University, Anita Borg worked for four years on a fault tolerant operating system for Auragen Systems Corporation in New Jersey and then with Nixdorf Computer in Germany. She spent 1986 to 1997 at Digital Equipment Corporation where she developed and patented a performance analysis method for high-speed memory systems. During that time she also developed Mecca, a system for communicating in virtual communities. What a busy woman!!! She is
the founder of the Grace Hopper Celebration in Computing, she was also a leader on women's computing issue in ACM and National Academy of Engineering.

She received lots of awards, including the Pioneer Awards from the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Augusta Ada Lovelace Award For Women In Computing. In 1998 she was inducted into the Women In Computing Hall Of Fame.

**How was this conference different from others that I had been to?**
Before I went to this conference, I was told that it was a very different conference to any other I had ever attended, however I didn't appreciate how different. I had big expectations of the Grace Hopper conference in terms of academic content and conference organisation after attending the World Wide Web Conference.

However it would not do justice to either to compare the two conferences. This was truly a celebration! It was a celebration of women who had broken through the glass ceiling to get to where they are.

The aim of the Grace Hopper conference is to bring together amazing women in computing from across the world to inspire and motivate others.

The conference was different in that there were not many paper sessions and did not have publications from it. Instead it consisted of panel sessions on women and leadership and technical sessions that had a wide appeal.

BOF sessions were also popular in comparison to other conferences I have been to. It was a way of women learning from each other, forming collaborations and making friends. A huge number of students attended, which was also different from other conferences I had been to.

**Key themes and ideas from conference.**
The main ideas that came out of the conference was that of images and perceptions. One key idea that i got from the conference was that if you close your eyes and think of a computer scientist you think of a man – at Grace Hopper you have no option but to think of a woman.
There was a discussion on stereotypes, in that they have to be abolished. Personally i now feel that the terms perceptions and stereotypes are not not used appropriately. When people say that they want to change perceptions or abolish stereotypes they are talking about changing the world.

There was a popular BOF session on the term 'female friendly science'. This is a term that is critised by students as there is a perception that this term means the subject has been dumbed down for the benefits of females. Jane Margolis (Educational Researcher) doesn't see the problem with it and wanted to know why students thought it was such a big issue.

Outreach/public evaluation was something that greatly interested me. These sessions asked the questions - how do you evaluate if an outreach project is effective. One set of questionnaires is not enough. Longitudinal research needs to be conducted that is both qualitative and quantitative. The issue with this is that the outreach scheme needs to have gone on for a certain amount of time and that funding and resources also needs to be available. A good example of this is computer clubs for girls.

I learnt a lot more of the work that ACM women were doing and how they would like to help BCSWomen collaborate. So let's watch this space to see how we can collaborate.

**What I learnt?**

I learnt the importance of research methodology and learnt to criticise other peoples. However i have only got a taster and am still needing to learn a lot more.

Preparation and research is more important than the questionnaire itself.

I have learnt that perceptions is a buzz word and that its meaning is not properly understood.

I learnt that my PhD is an ambitious one, however I have the support of those around me (and across the pond) and I am determined to do it.

I have learnt that it is ok to ask questions. It’s ok to break the rules if you believe it’s for a greater good!
Overall Thoughts

The conference was fantastic!!! I loved it! I made lots of friends and made loads of contacts with people that I've been to anxious to e-mail. It was great meeting women who know how to party! I think the below pic and 'song' says it all!

I am woman, hear me roar
In numbers too big to ignore
And I know too much to go back an' pretend
'cause I've heard it all before
And I've been down there on the floor
No one's ever gonna keep me down again

Have a look at Betinnas Blog: http://www.ncwit.org/connect.blog.php

The next one is in Florida and I am trying to work hard just so i can attend it and hopefully submit a poster or take part in a panel session.

Current thoughts are, maybe a session on WiC in UK and US - ACM/BCS comparison? Watch this space :-}