Chi-Fi, other conventions provide valuable experiences to students

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Chi-Fi is a nonprofit science fiction convention that takes place in Chicago; it has happened twice, and I have volunteered both times. This year, Chi-Fi's first full weekend occurred from March 19-22. Chi-Fi had many guests, including Skepchicks, Gigi Edgley (Chiana in Farscape), Jon St. John (Duke Nukem), and Philo Barnhart (Disney animator). While there, I met the electro-swing artist known as Vourteque. Vourteque is a DJ, a producer, a remix artist, a ringmaster, a musician, and even a carny. I saw the Gothsicles, one of my favorite nerdy bands, who make songs such as "My Guy Died" and "The Konami Code," and the members of Time Crash, a Trock band (Yes, Doctor Who rock is a genre). They were in the exhibitor hall, along with the Ice Cream Team, a company that provides characters and games for parties.

This con had quite a few panels on its sixth floor and parts of the seventh, and I Play Games was hosting video games on the seventh floor. There was a panel about what it's like to be an animator from one of the animators of the Animaniacs, and there were several discussion panels, including one about how scientists should team up with people in theatre to better explain their fields. There was a show called MacSith, a variant of MacBeth melded with Star Wars, held by Edge of Orion. There were even burlesque shows. The wonderful Claira Bell—among others—preformed as characters like Speed Racer, a female Robin (Batman), and Darth Vader.

Many students, especially in the STEM fields, do not go to conventions. Even though they generally enjoy the subject, it is difficult for them to interact with large groups of people. Some even still do not see the benefit in attending conventions. In order to get over stage fright, many people, including myself, become actors and actresses. In order to get over my fear of large crowds of people, I attended an anime convention more than nine years ago. Attending conventions is a great way to meet amazing people who—and here is the best part—also want to meet you. Attending conventions can help people who might otherwise never gain a valuable and highly desired skill for a potential employer.

While there were many great panels at Chi-Fi, my favorite part of this volunteer experience was actually the parties. I love to meet new people, and I believe that conventions are even a good networking opportunity for people who are interested in certain subjects to find people working in the fields in which they would like to work. In fact, my internship stems from a chance meeting at a convention earlier in the year. The parties at Chi-Fi generally had specific themes. Party themes included a skeptics party, a pirate party, a steampunk party, and many more.

Overall, I greatly enjoyed the experience. I met a large amount of amazing people, got to have wonderful conversations, and even got to see a friend of mine preform in a play having no prior notice of her involvement. I got to talk about science and technology, theatre, mythology, and even information security. Chi-Fi was an amazing convention and I plan to help them as much as I can every year.