



Stepping Into Tech: A Career Kickstart for Youth



Sohaila Ali

July 21, 2025

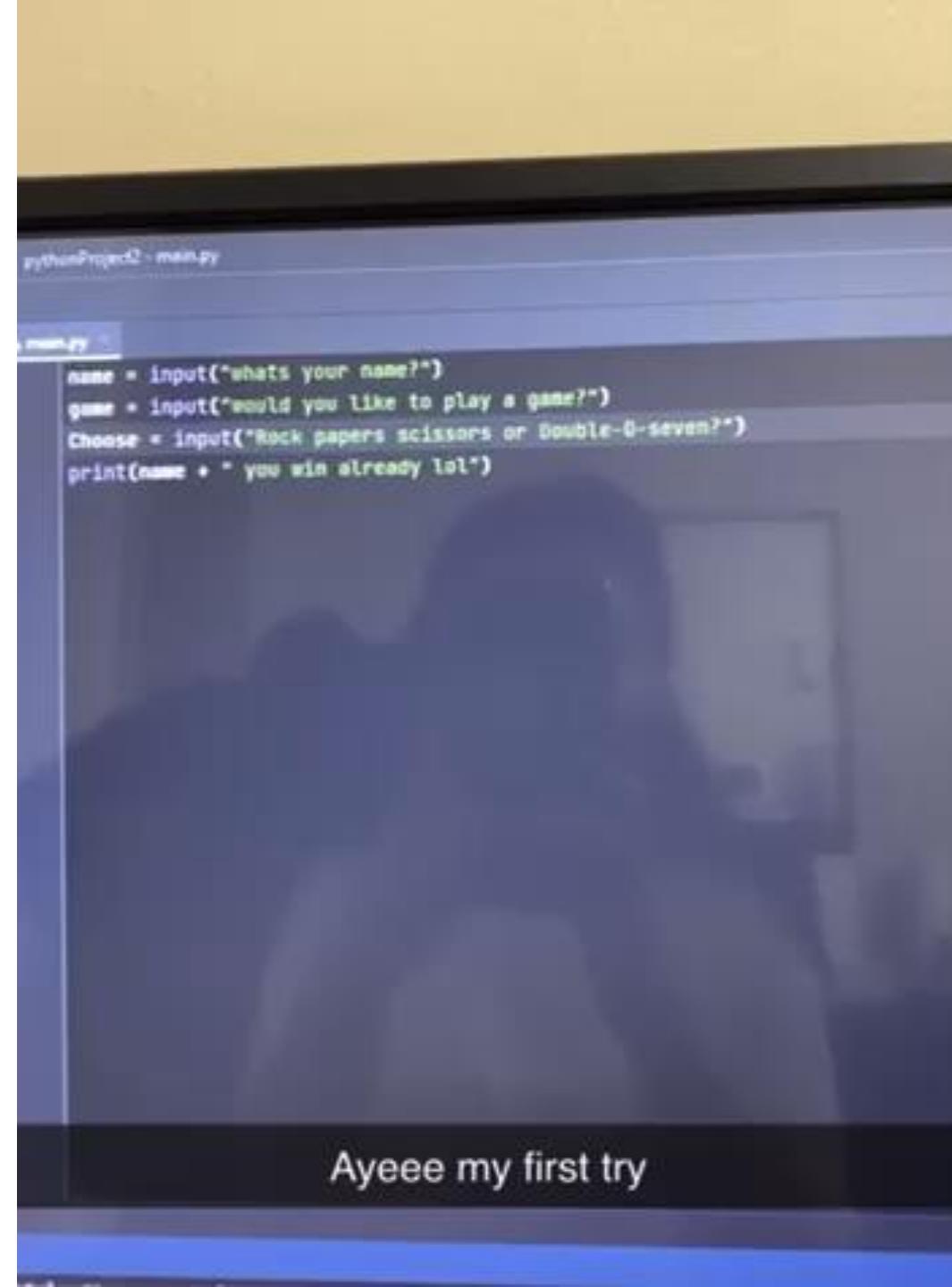
About Me

- Based in Greater Toronto Area, Canada
- Computer Science at Ontario Tech University - 18 years old
- Judged at 7 hackathons, mentored at 2 hackathons, and organized 2 hackathons
- Spoke at 5 tech events
- Worked as an ambassador at two organizations in the past
- Interested in Software Engineering, Cloud Computing, and AI

Let's talk about my
Journey into Tech!

How I got Interested in Pursuing a Career in Tech

Summer 2021



My First Hackathon!

February 2022

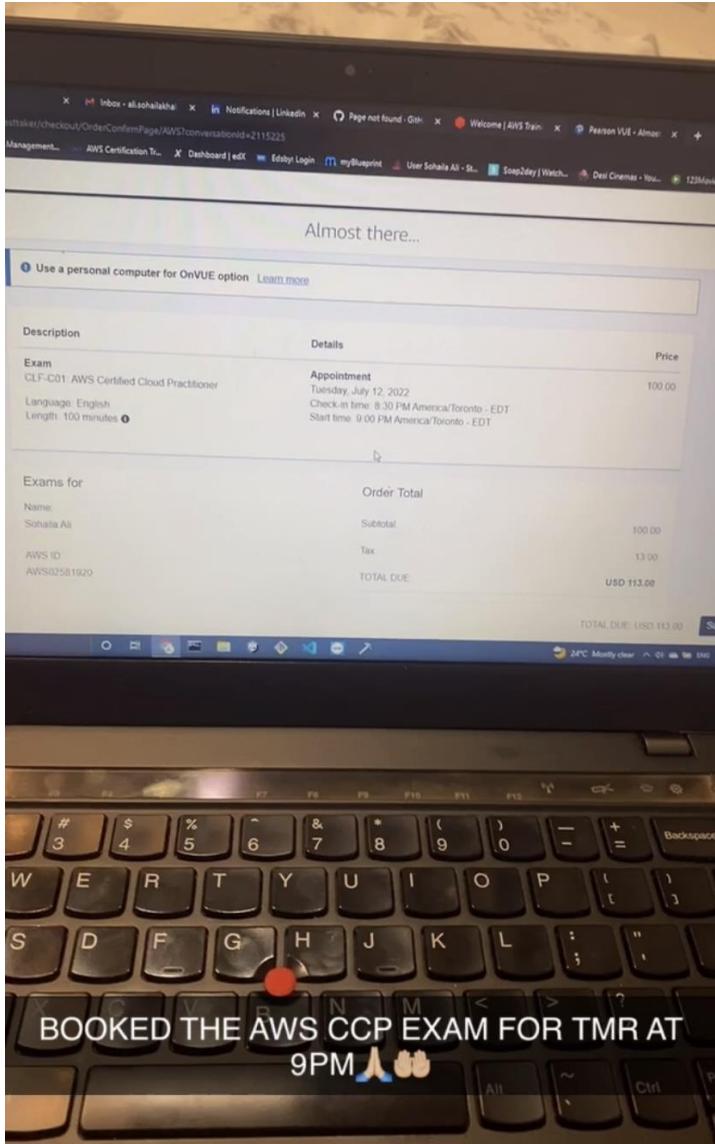


- Placed 2nd Overall
- \$300 cash prize
- Cert of participation
- Free RBC hoodie
- Got motivated to do more!



Cracked the AWS CCP Exam!

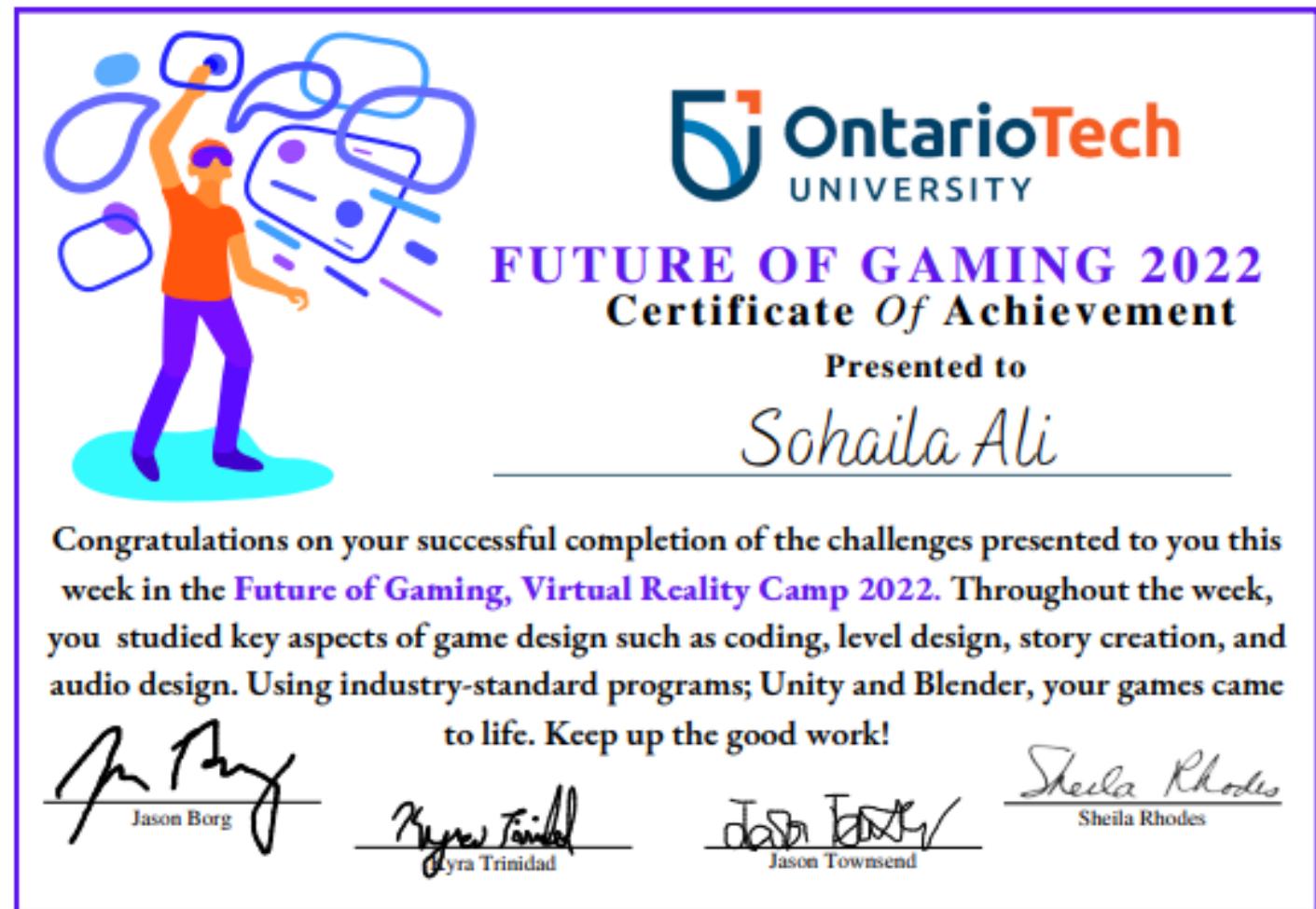
July 2022



- Got interested in Cloud Computing a lot
- Prepared for the exam for 3 weeks
- Dad gifted me a new computer!

Participated in 2 coding camps!

August 2022



Started working as a coding instructor!

August 2022



- Worked as a coding instructor at The Ismaili Canada (voluntary)
- Worked with 35+ students aged 13+
- Worked for 1 ½ year
- Taught computer programming such as the beginner & slightly intermediate levels of Python
- Developed the entire course curriculum and managed the flow of the sessions

Got accepted into CLC Ambassador program +
Started working at Staples Canada!
September 2022



- Grade 11 started
- Got accepted into Canada Learning Code's Teen Ambassador program
- Started working at Staples Canada as a Tech Sales Associate for co-op





Attended a coding workshop by Hackergal!

September 2022

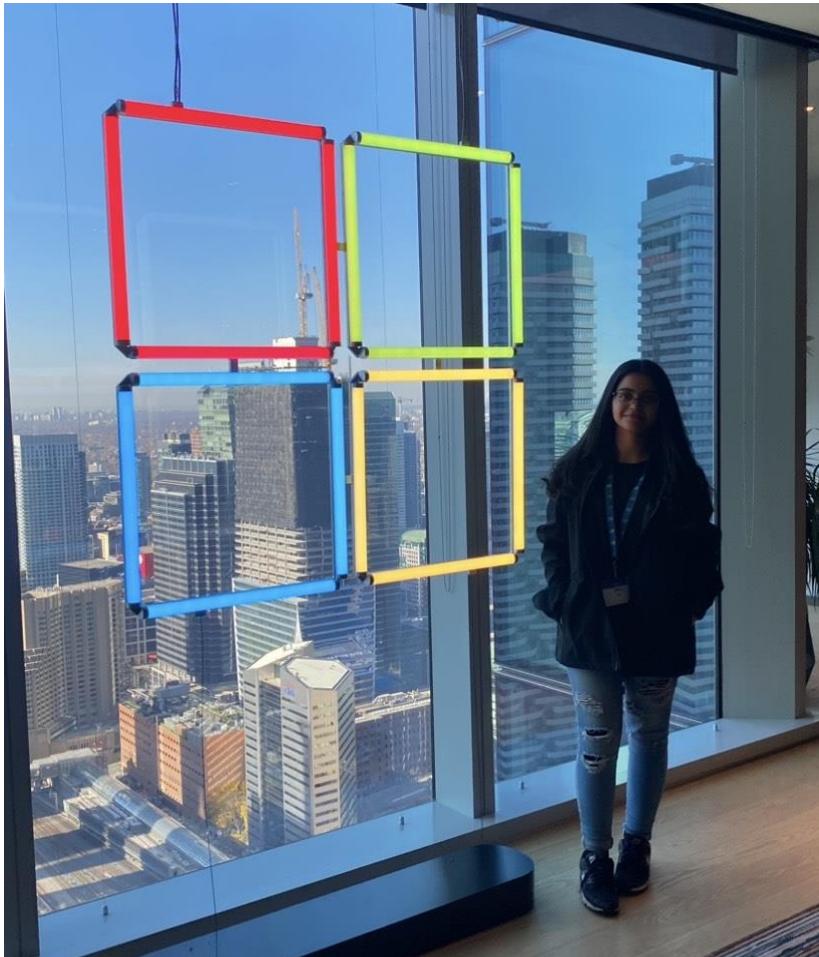


- 14 girls were selected to participate
- Took place at Sago Mini office
- 2 days long



Attended my
first ever tech
conference!

November 2022





Participated in an Engineering competition at UofT!

November 2022

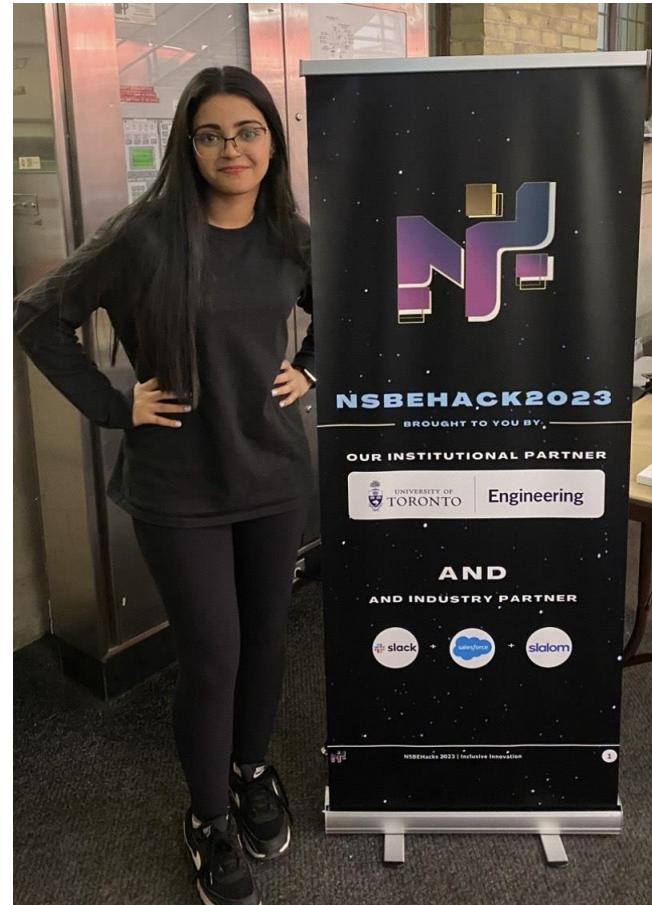


Participated in more events by UofT
+ made my 2nd hackathon win!
January – March 2023

UofT Engineering Kompetition (UTEK)



UofT NSBE Hacks (won the hackathon!)



UofT WISE Conference





Attended tons of conferences & summits!

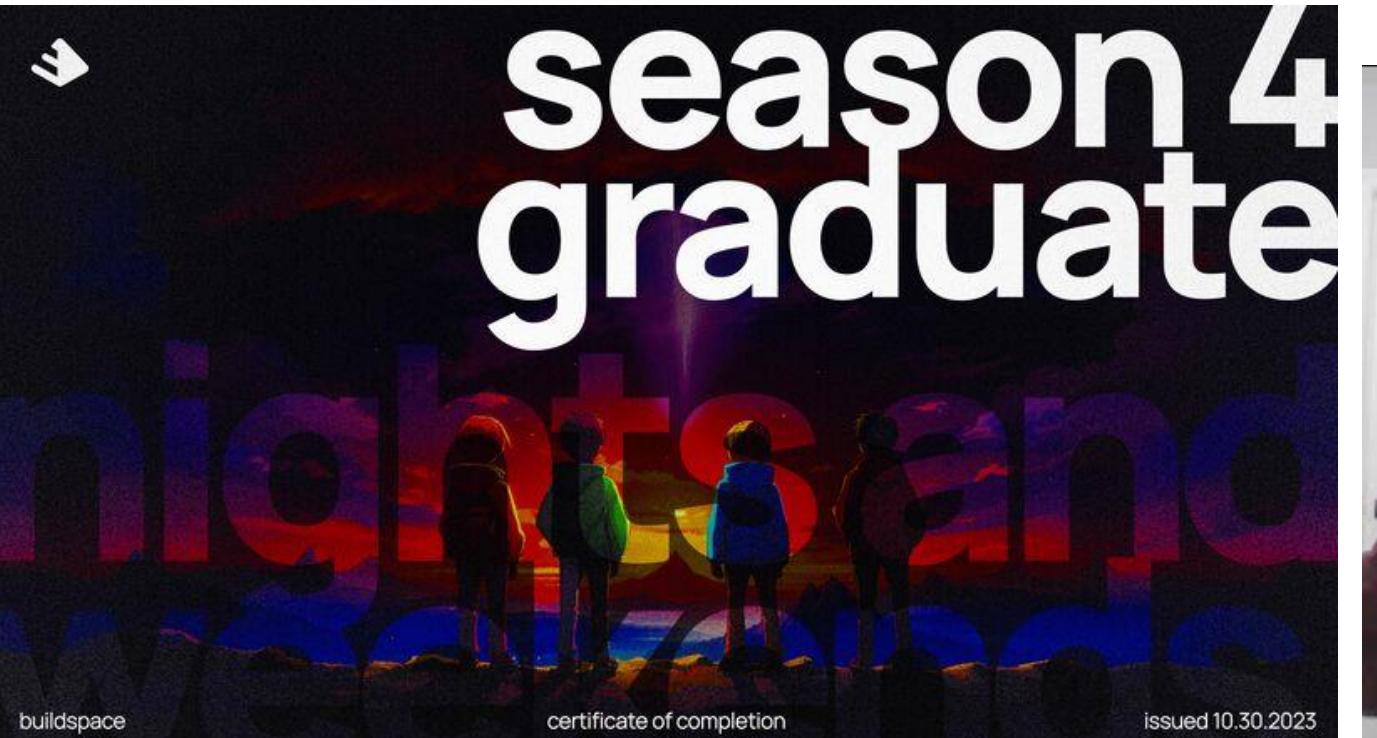
March – August 2023



Participated in buildspace nights & weekends season 4!

August - September 2023

- Participated in the program for 6 weeks with 15,000+ other builders
- Built a capacity units calculator for AWS DynamoDB





Got accepted into the Girls-e-mentorship program!

September 2023

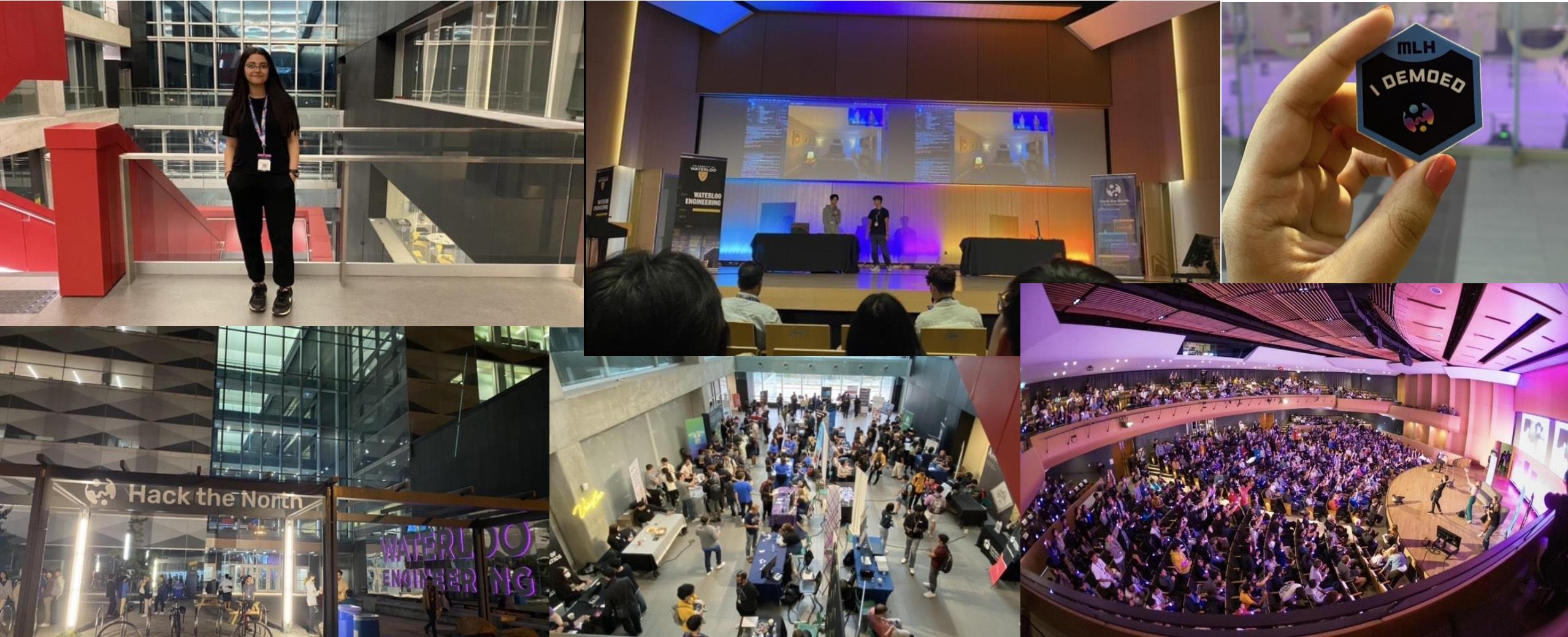


- 9 months long program for girls in Toronto + Hamilton
- Attended seminars (GEMinars) in partnership with Google, LinkedIn, SEPHORA, HP, and RBC
- Offered enrichment opportunities comprised of in-person events at Google, Meta, Burgundy Asset Management Ltd., Mars Canada, CGI, Capital One Business, and SickKids
- Offered 2 free Raptors 905 game tickets to each mentee
- Covered university application fees for 60 mentees in grade 12
- Received a certificate of completion



Participated in Canada's largest hackathon, Hack the North!

September 2023





Fun fact: got featured on Hack the North's 2024 website too!

hackthenorth.com

About Projects Stories Sponsors FAQ 2023 [Instagram](#) [X](#) [f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [..](#)



Sohaila Ali

Experienced Hacker, High School Student,
STEM Field Hacker

I was among the luckiest to have the awesome opportunity to hack at Hack the North in 2023! First of all, I applied randomly. When I saw the acceptance email, I got extremely happy and quickly RSVPed. I couldn't believe that I would get into such a competitive hackathon. Days before the event, I was debating whether I will be able to make it all the way from Oshawa to Waterloo or not... I took the chance, and here we are! I experienced the best hackathon ever! I must say that the organization was wonderful (schedules, time management, communication with hackers, workshops, transportation for hackers, etc), the food was delicious, the swag was very cool, the sponsors were top-tier, and let's not forget the unique Apple Wallet and Google Wallet hacker tickets! I met many new people as well as my friends at the hackathon, which made my



Participated in 2 hackathons: Hack the Valley by UofT and ALL IN by MLH!

October 2023

- Made my third hackathon win at ALL IN by MLH
- Received a mechanical keyboard as the prize
- The hacker applications for hack the valley are open now!!



free mech keyboard from MLH
All-In October 😊😊



Spoke at my first ever event: CyberToronto!
December 2023

The image is a promotional poster for CyberToronto Lightning Talks. It features a dark background with a purple diagonal graphic element. At the top left, the text "CYBERTORONTO" is in white, and "Lightning Talks" is in large yellow letters. Below that, the date "December 6, 2023 | 2:00 - 2:45 PM ET" is displayed. On the right side, the "cyber" logo is shown with a small person icon. The poster highlights three speakers with their portraits and details:

- SOHAILA ALI**
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
Topic: Uplifting your career in tech as a female teenager
- JEET VASUDEO**
ETHICAL HACKER
Topic: Small Sparks, Big Fires. The risks of overlooked weaknesses
- KHATIJA QURESHI**
CYBERSECURITY PROFESSIONAL
Topic: Cybersecurity for Kids & Youth



Lanyards and Badges Collection for 2023!





2024 began and attended more tech events!

January-May 2024



Spoke at the Canadian Women in Cybersecurity Conference!

May 2024

- Participated in a panel to discuss about youth in cybersecurity
- Hosted at Sheraton Hotel in Toronto
- General attendee tickets worth \$300 (got it for free yay!)



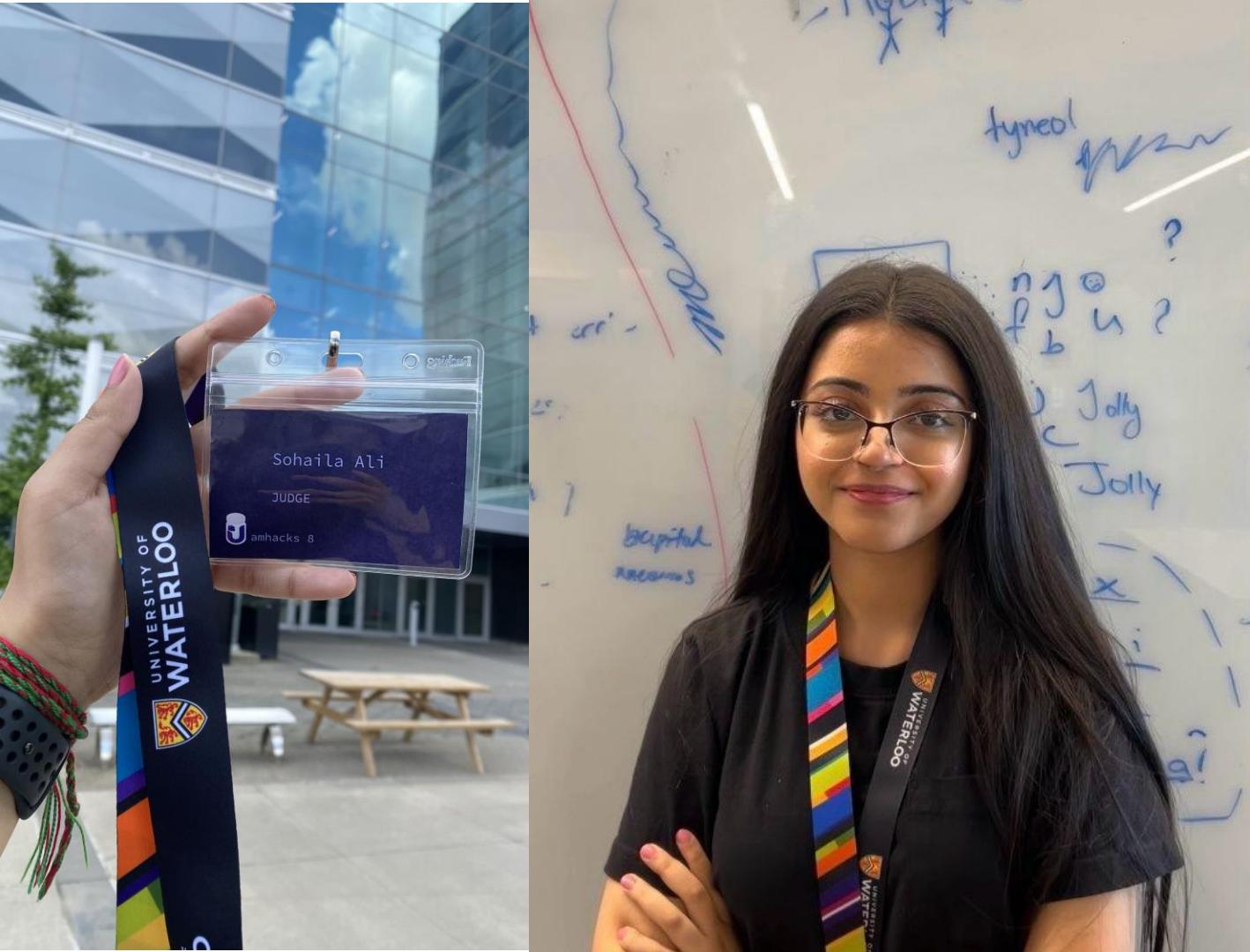
Participated in Zombie Apocalypse hackathon at Shopify office! May 2024



- Zombie-themed hackathon for high school students by Hack Club
- Hosted at the beautiful Shopify office in Toronto
- Offered \$20 food stipend to each hacker

Judged at JAMHacks by the University of Waterloo!

June 2024



- First time judging at a hackathon
- JAMHacks is Waterloo's largest high school hackathon
- Learned a lot!

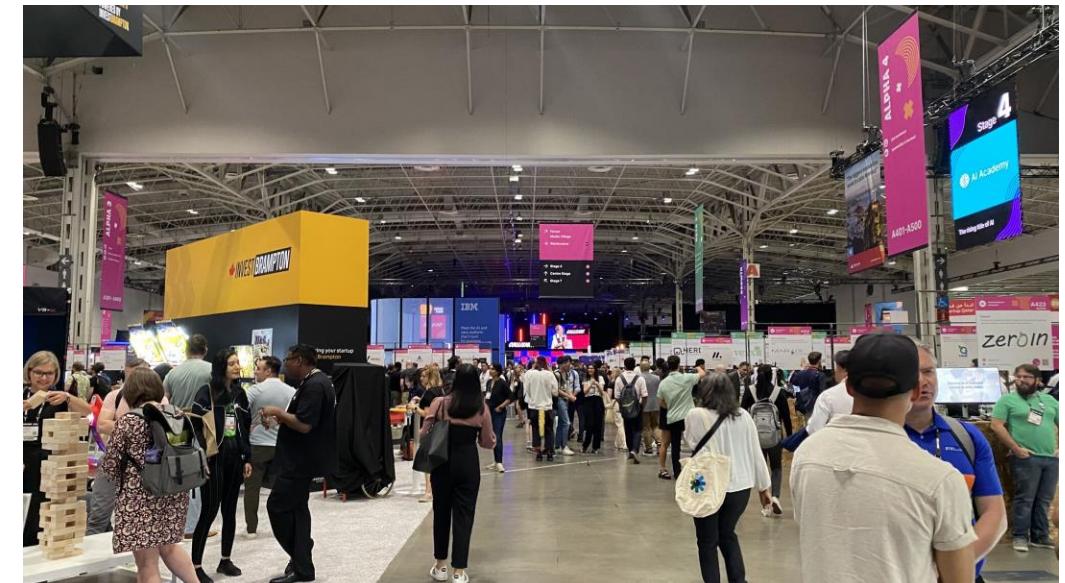


Attended the Collision Conference!

June 2024



- One of the world's largest tech conferences
- General attendee tickets worth \$1300, got it for free by placing in top 50 teams at Hack the Valley 2023
- Attended the conf for the second time overall
- Now renamed to Web Summit Vancouver!

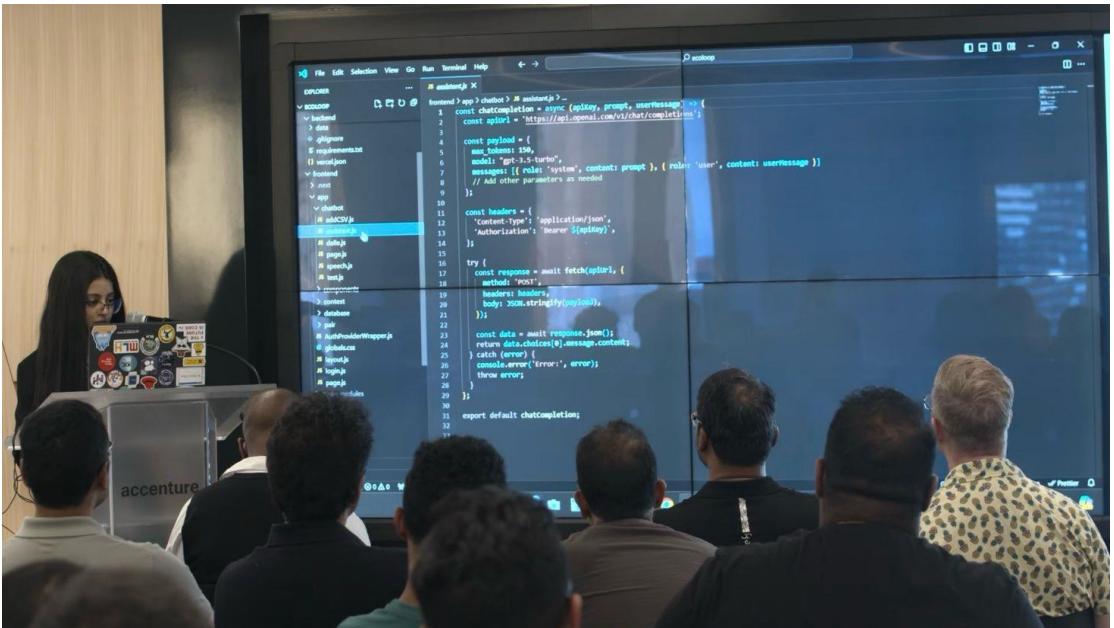


Spoke at the Accenture office in Toronto!

June 2024



- Demoed an AI project that I built at a hackathon
- 200 attendees present
- Event took place right after my grad :)





Spoke at C++ North Conf last year!

July 2024



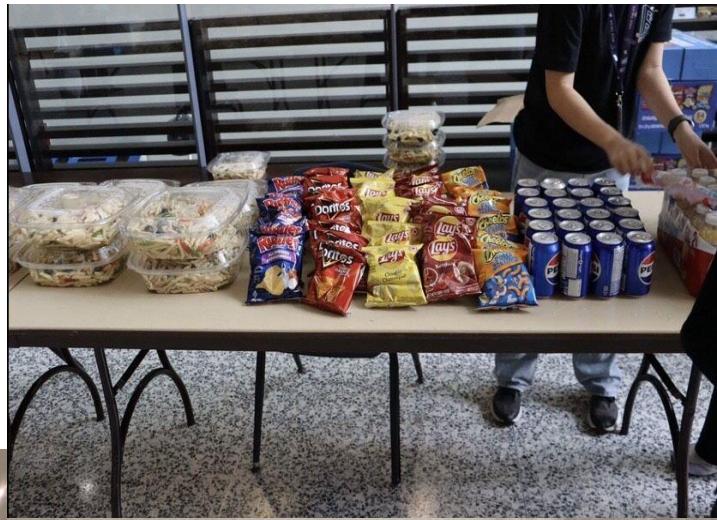
- Stayed at Fairmont Royal York hotel
- Conference held at Microsoft office
- Grateful to be back again for yet another year!!!



Judged at Hack the 6ix at UofT

August 2024

- Loved evaluating all projects
- Got very cool swag from hackathon organizers



- Held online for middle school-post secondary students
- Had 600 hackathon participants
- Worked as a Logistics Executive
- Secured two keynote speakers for the opening and closing ceremonies

Organized my first hackathon!

August 2024



CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

THE FOLLOWING AWARD IS PRESENTED TO

SOHAILA ALI

This certificate is presented to SOHAILA ALI for serving as an incredible organizer at Ignition Hacks 5, held on August 16-18, 2024.


Jasmine Xu
Director



- Moderated a panel on "Young Entrepreneurs and Founders"
- Judged the projects



Attended the AWS Summit Toronto

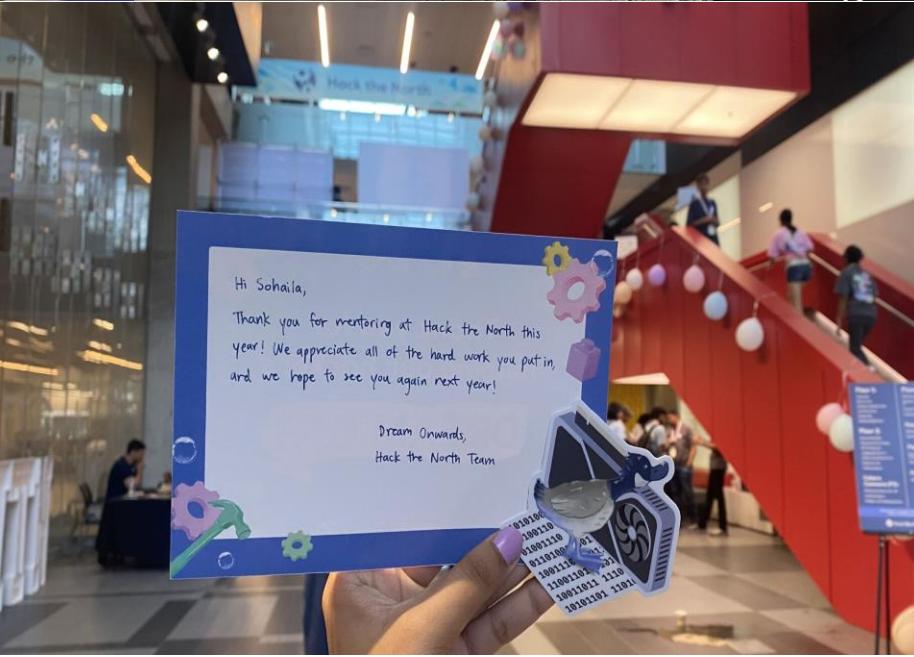
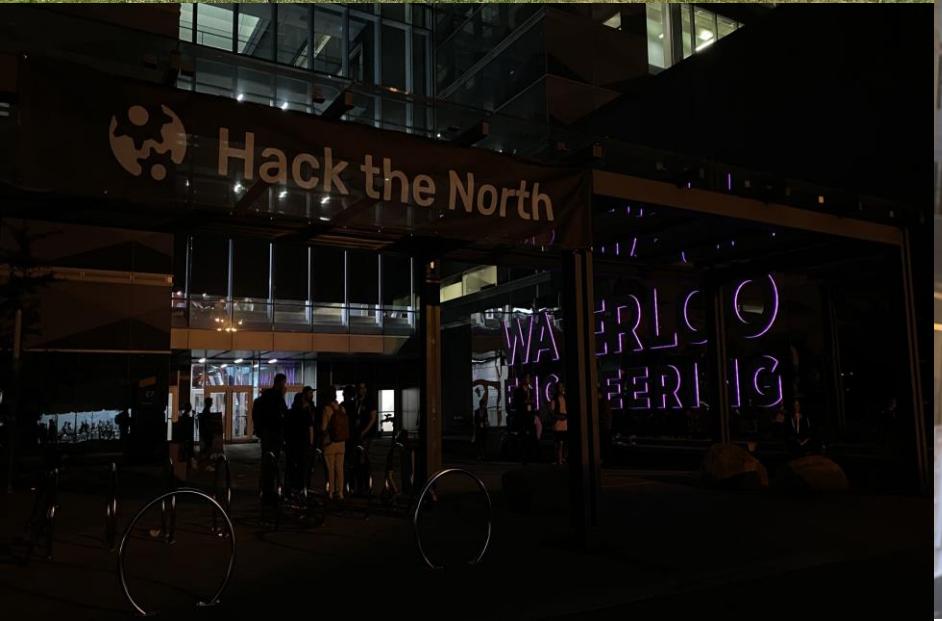
September 2024





Mentored at Hack the North!

September 2024



Organized Toronto Days of Service (DoS) hackathon

October 2024

- Hosted at the Shopify office in Toronto for girls in middle school
- Funded by Hack Club
- Hosted a dinner for networking





Judged at HackTrent

November 2024





Lanyards and Badges Collection for 2024!





Attended the AI tinkerers event at Google Toronto

January 2025



Mentored at ElleHacks & Judged at DeerHacks February 2025

- ElleHacks hosted at York University, DeerHacks hosted at UofT during same weekend
- Enjoyed mentoring for the second time!



Judged at GDG SolutionHacks

June 2025

- Hackathon hosted at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) by Google Developer Groups (GDG)





Judged at Hack404 at UofT

July 2025





Got a summer job at STEM Camp!

July 2025 (Present)



- Worked full time as a summer camp counselor
- Worked with 40 campers aged 5-13
- Introduced the concepts of technology, such as robotics, computer science, and coding through using Micro:bit, Minecraft Education, and more
- Led activities for campers including inquiry and discussion



More things in progress!

It is always a continuing journey :)

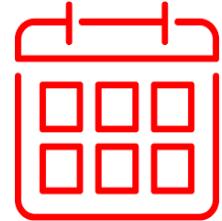
My advice on where to start



Create a LinkedIn profile and connect with people who inspire you, keep updating profile regularly



Learn coding from YouTube channels and W3Schools (FreeCodeCamp, Programming with Mosh, Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, etc)



Attend conferences, summits, and workshops a lot, you never know who you will network with next



Volunteer at tech events, especially at those which cost lots of \$\$\$

My advice on where to start (continued)



Participate in hackathons/CTFs (UofTHacks, Hack the North, MetHacks, Hack the Hill, and many more); aim MLH sponsored; perks included



Apply for ambassador programs (CAGIS, CLC, Hackergal, MLSA, WTM, etc)



Apply for mentorship programs (GEM, Uoft WiCS)



Gain certifications (AWS, Azure, GCP, if into Cloud-Computing)

And, some of my cheesy advice...

- Look at people on LinkedIn and other platforms as inspiration and role models, not competitors
- Do not ever, ever compare yourself with others and downgrade yourself, as everyone is at different stages of their lives (so are you)
- Give things a shot, even if you think you have absolutely **0%** chance of achieving it or making it there. This is where luck plays a huge role.
- Learn to give a heartwarming applause at others' achievements, and you will receive twice the amount of applause at your own achievements
- Enjoy your continuing journey :)

Connect with me on LinkedIn!



erX

Microsoft



accenture

Sohaila Ali

Aspiring Software Engineer | AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner | 5x Tech Event Speaker | 7x Hackathon Judge | 3x Hackathon Winner | 2x Hackathon Organizer | 2x Hackathon Mentor
Greater Toronto Area, Canada
9K followers · 500+ connections

STEM camp

STEM Camp



Ontario Tech University



Other: ↗

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