About the Collective

the Collective is an annual magazine created by The Sadie Collective to highlight the annual Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics and Related Fields, other work of The Sadie Collective, and future plans for the organization. In this inaugural issue readers will hear from the co-founders, key supporters, conference attendees, reflections of a recent Ph.D. graduate, and more.

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A Word From Our Co-Founders
Dear Sadie Collective Community and Allies,

Since the inaugural 2019 conference, the Sadie Collective has made waves by building upon conversations regarding Black womxn in economics and related fields. As noted in the speeches of the inspiration behind the Sadie Collective, Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander was acutely guided by her intersectional identity as a Black woman, in order to create a society that works for all.

Guided by her commitment, this year’s conference in February 2020, created a world which highlighted the scholarship, ambition, passion, and dedication of Black women with a record setting attendance, an inaugural research reception, and a keen focus on mentorship enabling the role model effect.

On the heels of our conference, conversations about the ongoing pandemic and systemic racism, evinced by police brutality and disproportionate job loss of Black women, further grounds us in our commitment. As we navigate these difficult times, we continue to be guided by the words of Dr. Alexander:

“I hold it the obligation of every American to remove those inequities which have crept into our national life and caused men to fear want and to fear each other.”

- Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander
March 4, 1941 in her speech “The Role of the Negro Women in the Economic Life of the Postwar South”

Thank you for joining us in the fight to shape a better world through fighting against structural iniquities that are deeply embedded in American society. Our work is only possible, together.
A Word From Our Partners

The 2020 Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics and Related Fields would not have been possible without the generous support of our main two sponsors, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Urban Institute. We are also grateful for the generosity of time and resources afforded to us by the Brookings Institution, who acted as our fiscal sponsor in securing funds from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. We are thankful for their support. When asked about why they choose to support the Sadie Collective, here’s what representatives from the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute had to say:
I’m old enough to remember joining the social justice protests of the late 1960s and the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations of the 1970s. I remember the thrill of discovering that there were so many of us. I recall the impatience of youth: When do we want it? Now! But I also recall the persistence of some gray-haired allies, the ones who had been fighting for change since before I was born and were still at it, the ones who tried to share the lessons of the past, tolerated our mistakes and understood that progress depended on the energy, commitment and talent of the next generation.

I have been in meetings where a bunch of well-meaning white people wondered why there weren’t more people of color in the room. I have seen and, to be honest, organized panels and conferences where we were satisfied that there were at least a few Black faces amid the sea of white ones. I had never been in a room like the first Sadie Collective conference on a Saturday morning in February 2019, one of very few white men in a room with dozens of young Black women who were studying economics – probably the largest single gathering ever of Black women pursuing economics as a discipline. The 2020 conference was bigger and better, but I’m so glad I got to be at the very first one.

So now I’m one of those gray-haired ones, marveling at the marketing and organizing creativity and skill of the Sadie Collective, laboring to offer advice or connections only when asked for, trying not to be the old guy who tells the young folks what they should be doing differently – and getting out of the way so that change can come faster. I’m proud to be considered your ally.
In February, the Urban Institute had the honor of hosting the Sadie Collective’s second annual conference. Our halls were filled with talented, smart, visionary, and entrepreneurial Black women who want to use analytic power to change the economic profession, change policy, and change the world. It was exhilarating.

While the dais hosted some of the accomplished woman I most admire in economic disciplines – Dr. Susan Ford, Dr. Janet Yellen, Dr. Bridget Terry Long, and Urban’s own Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi, among others – I was most inspired by the young women assembled, what they had already accomplished to be there, and what I know they will accomplish ahead.

The women of the Sadie Collective have banded together to lift one another up and make themselves heard in fields whose gatherings never look like our conference center looked that day in February.

I am not an economist, but I have shaped economic policy my entire career. Leaders like me must listen, embrace new ideas to strengthen the quantitative and economic policy professions, and act against those systems and forces that exclude Black women from our fields. We need these women doing this work; because it matters very much who is sitting at the table, who is shaping the questions, and who is collecting the evidence and interpreting findings. These disciplines will achieve excellence only by subjecting ideas to the questions and new ideas that these women and other voices of color and difference will bring.

Economics, data science, and research strive for rigor and objectivity, as they should. But too often, rigor is an excuse to avoid rethinking assumptions and objectivity is cited to avoid deeper investigation into societal barriers and rules that reinforce racial advantage. Circumstances are often described as though they are inherent or natural, rather than the results of many choices we must own.

To me, objectivity also means investigating long-held assumptions, tackling root causes, listening to – and taking guidance from – new voices, and seeing evidence in lived experience as well as numerical data. Objectivity requires we name racism when we see it, that we explain how its roots run through the American experience, understanding its lasting influence in ourselves and our own institutions.

The Urban Institute is proud to partner with the Sadie Collective. I cannot wait to see what the Sadie Collective does next.
Dr. Mackenzie Alston graduated from Texas A&M University with her Ph.D. in economics in May 2019. She will begin her second year as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at Florida State University (FSU) this fall. At FSU, she conducts research to study how people are affected by and change their behavior because of discrimination and stereotypes. As a Ph.D. student, she examined whether job applicants believed that managers of stereotypically male jobs would be biased against women and studied whether negative stereotypes affect the academic performance of Black students at historically Black colleges and universities. Moving forward, she plans to continue studying topics related to race and gender. For example, she is designing projects to measure individuals’ perceptions of police bias and to examine how faculty of color have different experiences than their colleagues.

Alston is also very proud of her involvement in the American Economic Association Summer Program, a program designed to prepare underrepresented minorities for Ph.D. programs in economics. She participated in the program as an undergraduate student in 2012. As a graduate student, she was a Teaching Fellow and co-instructor. This most recent summer, she returned as an instructor.
What sparked your interest to get to a Ph.D. in Economics?

My parents raised me to value education, and my mom wanted her children to earn a degree above hers. She’s actually working on her doctorate right now, but at the time, that meant that I would get a Ph.D. When I was in high school, I realized that I loved teaching and wanted to be a professor. I understood that a Ph.D. would help me pursue that career choice.

For these reasons, I knew I was ultimately going to get a Ph.D. before I even started my freshman year at Washington University in St. Louis (WashU). I just didn’t know in what area. Originally, I started school with the belief that I would be a Spanish professor. It wasn’t until I took Principles of Microeconomics with Professor Bandyopadhyay that I knew economics was the direction I wanted to go in.

As I took her class, I realized that studying the costs and benefits associated with different options helps you understand why people, businesses, governments, etc. make the choices that they do. I wanted to keep learning about how I could use the tools I picked up from these economics classes to make sense of the world around me. So I changed my major and decided that I wanted to be an economics professor.

Who were your role models and mentors, and how did they support you along the way?

As an undergraduate student, my main mentors were Bruce Petersen and Katie Coffman. Bruce was my official advisor, but I didn’t get to know him well until I enrolled in one of his classes and offered to help him make PowerPoint slides for his lectures.

That semester was the start of one of the best mentoring relationships I have had to this day. He helped me figure out how the graduate application process works, advised me to major in mathematics (which was a very important piece of advice!), and made sure I had everything I needed as I completed my independent study. We are still in touch, and he’s the perfect person to talk to when I start putting too much pressure on myself. He’s great at reminding me of all of the things that I have already accomplished.

During the summer after my junior
year, I was Katie Coffman’s research assistant when she was at The Ohio State University. (She’s now at the Harvard Business School.) She trained me on how to run experiments, and I used that knowledge to run my own experiment the semester after when I returned to WashU.

Her training and lessons also gave me a head start when I took classes on experimental economics in graduate school. I already knew how to design and conduct an experiment because of my time with her. Katie and I are still in touch. She was instrumental in helping me nail down details of my job market paper (the main paper you tell everyone about when you’re applying for jobs). She gave me advice on how to handle tricky situations when I was a graduate student, and she wrote me a letter of recommendation when I was applying for assistant professor positions.

Without a doubt, Bruce and Katie played major roles in my academic life. However, there were many others who helped me along the way from staff in the WashU economics department like Karen Rensing to then-graduate students like Stephanie Heger to family and friends.

There is simply not enough space to name all of the mentors who helped me in graduate school. Aside from faculty at Texas A&M University, I was lucky to be supported by many others like Sarah Jacobson and Angelino ViceIsa to name a couple of people.

What advice would you give to young Black women interested in pursuing Ph.D.’s in economics?

My first suggestion is that you find and keep as many cheerleaders in your life as you can. These are people that you know are rooting for you to succeed. They’re encouraging, and they have faith in your ability to overcome challenges. They don’t have to be fellow economists.

While I’ve been fortunate to have uplifting mentors like Bruce and Katie, my family and non-econ friends have also been huge sources of support. If you’re having trouble finding cheerleaders, try older students in your program (e.g., 4th or 5th years) who you may notice are already mentoring younger students and join programs like the AEA Mentoring Program, which will connect you to other minority students.

My second suggestion is related to the first. Once you start graduate school, I think it’s important to build a sense of community within your local area. You might connect with people in your cohort, members at your gym, graduate students from other departments, or members of your church or religious group. There may even be a Black Graduate Student Alliance or something similar that you can join.

Graduate school can be stressful, and it doesn’t help when you feel alone. Make sure you have people you can turn to and just have fun with. For example, while I was at Texas A&M, I had a Black female friend who was a Ph.D. student in the clinical psychology department. She would come over to my place on Thursday nights, and we would vent about school and watch How to Get Away with Murder together. These were great times that made my graduate school experience much better!
I’d say my transition went fairly well! There were definitely changes. For example, I was no longer a research assistant. Now I was a peer to the other professors in my department. Now it was graduate students who were coming to me to ask for advice. Now the goal wasn’t to produce three chapters for a dissertation but to make a significant enough impact to secure tenure. Now I get emails about faculty meetings! I would say that figuring out the best way to manage my time between research, teaching, service, and socializing has been the biggest challenge.

That said, I’m very lucky to have colleagues that I enjoy spending time with, a supportive dean, and a great job.

It’s hard to say what my biggest challenge was. Maybe determining what choices made the most sense for me. When people give you advice, they may be well-intentioned, but their goals for you may not necessarily align with the goals you have for yourself. As a result, they may want you to go in a direction that you’re not sure is the right one for you. Figuring out what decisions I should take (e.g., graduating in five years instead of six) when there were people whose opinions I truly valued who felt differently and staying firm about these decisions was something that I found difficult at times.

My biggest accomplishment was my success in the job market. I worked really hard to get my job market paper ready and spent countless hours on my job applications. I ended up with multiple interviews, flyouts, and offers, which I still feel incredibly blessed about. I signed an offer with Florida State University the spring before I graduated, and that was certainly a high point!

How has your transition been from full-time economics Ph.D. student to assistant professor of economics?
If you could have dinner with one of your heroes, who would it be, why, and what would you all be eating?

This will be an odd answer, but the first name that popped into my head was Patrick Kane, who is a professional hockey player for the Chicago Blackhawks. While I might not dub him as my hero, per se, he is certainly someone I look up to and admire.

I really got into hockey during my first year of graduate school. (Note: It is a terrible idea to fall in love with a professional sports team that plays two to three times a week the same year in which you will be taking qualifiers or preliminary exams.) He was so young and shorter than most of his teammates, but he was (and still is) a superstar. You could see he was passionate about hockey and determined to be the best player in the league. I love watching him play. I also found the Blackhawks games in 2014/2015 to be quite inspiring. There would be games where there was barely any time left, and I would be convinced that we were going to lose. Yet the Blackhawks often would find some way to turn the game around. They never gave up.

When I’d watch games like that, I’d turn off the tv and feel inspired to give graduate school everything I got. And I’d think about Patrick’s dedication and think about ways in which I could push myself harder.

So by having dinner with Patrick Kane, I would finally have the chance to tell him that he, a hockey player, played a role through my Ph.D. program.

What would we be eating? If we’re in Chicago, I’d ask him to use his connections to get catering from Wildberry Café. I’d order the Butcher Block skillet (ham, sausage, bacon, eggs, cheese, and hash browns), which comes with pancakes. The skillet is delicious, and I try never to leave Chicago without eating it.

If we could turn our private dinner into more of a dinner party, some names that come to mind for the invite list would include Serena Williams, Ruth B. Ginsburg, and Mary Daly of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. They all have had fascinating lives, and what they’ve accomplished has been truly inspirational.
The 2020 Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics and Related Fields attracted more than 270 Black womxn and allies spanning over 130 institutions. During the conference, over 90 formal mentorship pairings were formed and our attendees were able to network with over 30 different career recruiters. For many, attending the conference was a transformative, impactful experience. When asked about their experience attending SACE 2020, here is what a few of our members had to say:
Faith Achugamonu

Wakefield High School

I absolutely loved the Sadie Collective Economics Conference! It really assisted me in multiple ways, and continues to do so. The first day’s career fair really helped me to know more about the jobs available to economists that I did not have a clear understanding of before. For instance, gaining knowledge about positions that range from those in think tanks where policies can be developed to positions on the Federal Reserve Board.

In addition, I was able to gain some long lasting helpful contacts that gave me so much joy. Moreover, with so much Black excellence that surrounded me, I was more inspired to pursue my passion in economics knowing that I would not be alone and that the system needs people like me so that the people that influence economic policy look like the rest of America.

Sydney Utsey

Morgan State University

My first attendance to the Sadie Collective Conference was unexpected and energizing. I went into this conference not knowing what to expect. Within the first hour, I was overwhelmed by the warmth, empowerment, and intelligence from all the people at the conference. I left motivated and inspired to grow through my goals, not just as a woman, but as a Black woman. It felt amazing to be around so many Black women with almost all similar passions and desire to help others. I cannot wait for the next conference.

I left motivated and inspired to grow through my goals, not just as a woman, but as a Black woman.

Fama Ndiaye

Syracuse University

It was even bigger and better than last year’s. I left inspired and honestly just so happy. I am super thankful to the girls for creating a space like the Sadie Collective.
The 2020 Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics & Related Fields proved to be an excellent opportunity for me to meet women of color from across the field of economics and learn more about opportunities to further engage in economics research. As a young professional in research, I was eager to develop connections with people who shared my passion for economics and public policy, and the conference paved the way for this and so much more.

What I appreciated the most from the conference was the strong focus on experiences specific to Black women in economics. From the thoughtful selection of panelists to the segment dedicated to maintaining mental wellness in the workspace, the organizers thought of the countless ways that Black women engage with and are impacted by the field. By the end of the conference, I felt inspired by the stories told by women who had at one point stood in my shoes.

As a Black woman in a field where our presence is rare, it is obviously of paramount importance that we have community. If nothing else, the Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference gave me the impression that I had a place in economics, but it also gave me a mentor, vital information that allowed me to see where I could be and the work that I could do, and people I could ask for guidance and advice. It made me feel much less alone in the field, and some connections I have made through the conference and the collective were vital to my professional and personal development.

...I felt inspired by the stories told by women who had at one point stood in my shoes
The best part about attending the Sadie Collective Conference was the understanding and awe in realizing that all the established women who were there wanted to be, and wanted to help me, and wanted to see me do well. Everyone talks about representation and how it’s essential, but to have a space where you can see yourself in other women at such a capacity doing such extraordinary things was unique.

To be surrounded by Black women in and of itself is not only a privilege, but a luxury. To then be surrounded by Black women who have shared interests as you, that’s a blessing. Surrounded by Black women who have shared interests as you, that’s a blessing. This conference opened a lot more than just opportunities, though it’s definitely provided that. It’s also shaped how I plan my future, and brightened me to learning all the ways I can succeed, and help others to. I’ve established meaningful professional and personal relationships as a result, and I’m excited to witness the growth of this organization.

...The Sadie Collective empowers me to know that one day I can accomplish my dream and be a major player in the world.

Cari Harris
Bank of America

Makeda Tadessa
University of Minnesota
#SACE2020 Recap

Awards Night

The inaugural Sadie Collective awards was created to celebrate all that was accomplished, learned and experienced at the 2020 conference, as well as honor Black womxn who are rising stars and established leaders in economics, public policy, and related fields. During the event, four awards were bestowed to one undergraduate student, one graduate student, a young professional, and a seasoned academic for their contributions to the fields of economics, policy, data science, and/or finance. The awardees were chosen through a committee nomination process from members at the Brookings institution and the Urban Institute. The awards night was hosted by Youtuber Jouelzy and also featured live entertainment by Maryland-based singer Saneit, who sang the Black National Anthem.
I had no idea how much I needed to be a part of the Sadie Collective until I arrived at the Urban Institute in Washington D.C. There was no need for me to be reminded of the excellence of Black women, but to see that excellence in a single room was one of the most empowering experiences of my life. The Sadie Collective not only showcases the power and brilliance of Black women, but it uplifts them.

I became hopeful for the future of Black women in Economics and related fields when I saw the efforts taken by the Sadie Collective to encourage a younger cohort of women to embrace their talents. Graduate school is an isolating experience. The current state of academia often means that two Black women pursuing a PhD in the same department is rare, and three might be unheard of. To look around a room and see so many Black women doing incredible work reminded me that I am not alone. I left the conference feeling reenergized. I was inspired by the incredible group of women who made the Awards Night, and the Sadie Collective, a reality.

Participating in the SACE 2020 Awards Night, I felt proud and elated to be surrounded by Black joy. The room was filled with gorgeous melanated women, cheering each other for the contributions that we are all making to the field of economics. In celebrating each other, we were not only empowering and building each other up but also breaking down the stereotype that we drag each other down the ladder of success.

Receiving an award was incredibly humbling, and it has had a significant impact on my undergraduate career. This June, I completed my course work for my Honours Degree in Economics debt-free. The award made this possible, and I am sincerely grateful to have received support from the Sadie Collective. As I enter the workforce, I look forward to continuing to utilize my degree to bring more Black women into spaces that educate, empower, and edify them. In doing so, I hope that there will be more nights to celebrate the ingenuity of Black women in economics, data science, finance, and public policy.
Inaugural Research & Networking Reception

This year, the Sadie Collective hosted a Research and Networking Reception. A two-hour event that took place in the largest auditorium and a seminar room within the Brookings Institution. The event featured ten women in total, nine of which were poster presenters and the final, a job market candidate who also doubled as our Research Spotlight. Here are a few remarks from the reception’s participants:
During the research and networking reception, I had the opportunity to meet and engage with Black women who are scholars in economics and related fields. It was probably the first time in my life that I met so many Black female economists at different points in their careers. Hearing about their research projects and their plans for the future was exciting and energizing. I cannot wait to see how their careers unfold. Additionally, the event built a community in which we were able to encourage each other, ask and offer advice, and lend an ear to listen to the challenges facing Black women and discuss ways to address them. This kind of community is one whose effects will extend into the future and will only grow stronger.

Tihitina Andarge

Recent 2020 job market candidate from the University of Maryland College Park

It was probably the first time in my life that I met so many Black female economists at different points in their careers.
Thrilling, enlightening and inspiring are three words that describe my three-day weekend attending the 2nd annual Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics & Related Fields. Initially, I was nervous when I arrived at the research and networking reception. However, engaging in conversations with young girls as they shared their experiences and perspectives on the world of economics began to thrill me. Networking with persons of varying approaches liberated my views on the importance and power of Black women in the field of economics. The inspiration garnered as I connected with the conference hostesses and other Black women has motivated me to further study economics. Seeing young college educated women plan and execute a conference of over 100 women in attendance was amazing. Overall, my experiences at the conference compares to a roller coaster ride. The anticipation makes you nervous, but the thrill makes it all worth it.

Participating in the SACE2020 research conference was an invaluable experience. As a student who was very interested in furthering her research experience, the Sadie Collective provided an opportunity for myself and others to showcase social issues we were most passionate about.

As a research scholar we were given mentorship and resources that allowed us to further develop our abstracts and data. During my presentation at the research conference I was able to gain experience in public speaking and receive direct feedback from economists, while connecting with professionals serving in the public policy space.

The Sadie Collective provided an opportunity for myself and others to showcase social issues we were most passionate about.
Over the next year, The Sadie Collective plans to continue and exceed our mission of promoting Black women in the fields of economics, public policy, data science and finance by increasing our programming, building our membership, developing longevity and expanding our capacity.

This fall, we will be hosting our first partnership event in conjunction with the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, a virtual 2-day conference including a workshop on data analysis and programming, panels of research assistants and economists, and a virtual career fair.

The year 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of Sadie T.M. Alexander received her PhD in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania. We look forward to celebrating this milestone achievement over the next year with special programming honoring her legacy.

To receive more updates from the Sadie Collective, please see our website at www.sadiecollective.org and follow us on Instagram and Twitter @SadieCollective.
Call To Action: An Open Letter

The Sadie Collective is dedicated to fight against racial injustice and systemic inequality--especially in regards to its presence within the economics profession. Please read our open letter to economics institutions in the face of #BlackLivesMatter to support our cause.
the Collective