

CV | dr. elita layà

East Bay Area, CA

Research-oriented scholar activist with a passion for leadership, education, and counseling for liberation.

bio

dr. elita layà (*they*) is an experienced practitioner-activist in counseling, nonprofit work, K–12 education, and higher education leadership. Their **intersectional** perspective and **transdisciplinary** insights guide them as a *co-conspirator for liberation*. dr. layà holds **master’s degrees** in *Cultural Studies* and *Counseling Psychology*, and a **Ph.D. in Education**. While their heart-work focuses on **anti-oppressive leadership and research practices, burnout, imposter syndrome**, and **adulthood**, their research focuses on **anti-Blackness, critical death studies, education trauma, gender anarchism**, and **co-creating liberatory schooling**.

dr. layà teaches **graduate counseling** courses at *Saint Mary’s College of California* and the *California Institute of Integral Studies*, and **undergraduate Africana Studies and Social Justice** courses in the *Contra Costa Community College District*. As a **community organizer, professional speaker**, and **cultural worker**, they also serve as **Chief Visionary Officer of Twalo**, providing **anti-oppression coaching, audits, and workshops** for professionals working with youth activists and leaders. Guided by their *freedom dreams*, they invite people to **radically reimagine, co-create change**, tap into our **communal power**, and reclaim **liberatory minds, bodies, and futures**.

skills

Data Analysis & Research Engaging Public Speaking Institutional Transformation Restorative & Healing-Centered Transformative Coaching	Anti-Oppressive Leadership Program Assessment & Auditing Affirming Reflexive Spaces Intergenerational Coalition-Building Community-Based & Project-Driven	Culture & Diversity Consulting Holistic Engagement Workshops & Trainings Theory-to-Practice Intersectional Praxis	Curriculum (Re)design Community Connections Student Programming Culture & Diversity Black Feminist Praxis
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subject expertise

- anti-oppression doula: critical self-inquiry and self-reflexive
 - afrofuturism, abolition, and critical mentoring
 - self-care as body liberation and embodiment
 - asset-based & community cultural wealth mindsets
 - **anti-racism + DEIB 101: from theory to practice**
 - **mental health care for student activists & sexuality, gender, and racially marginalized communities**
 - **fostering youth voice, choice, and activism**
 - **burn out v.s. cocreating joy & healing-centered environments**
 - **restorative vs. transformative vs. “call-out” practices**
 - talks on scholarly anti-oppressive research + citation praxis
- **applied Black Feminist/intersectionality frameworks**
 - **community-oriented + project-based learning/schools**
 - **gender liberation + gender anarchism + afrotansfuturism**
 - freedom dreamin’ schools for liberation
 - **gender “inclusivity” & showing up for trans students**
 - **unpacking adulthood in youth “serving” organizations**
 - intergenerational communities with young leaders
 - **pedagogies of policing, paternalism, and alternatives**
 - **education trauma and the education survival complex**
 - abandoning “Imposter Syndrome” for social change
 - regrounding your “WHY” in education + counseling

recent professional experience

* EDUCATOR

Adjunct Faculty

Graduate Teaching Experience

- Teach graduate-level counseling courses in a CACREP-accredited program, prepare them for licensure and professional practice
- Develop and implement competency-based curricula, integrating trauma-informed care, and contemporary clinical methodologies
- Supervise and mentor future counselors, guiding them in research, evidence-based interventions, ethical decision-making, case conceptualization, applied ethics, and culturally responsive counseling for diverse practice settings.

California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), Graduate Counseling Programs | Fall 2025 - Current

Graduate Courses Taught

- Course Title: “Psychopathology” | Spring 2026, Graduate (2 sections, On Campus)
- Course Title: “Research Methods” | Fall 2025 // Summer 2026, Graduate (On Campus)
- Course Title: “Multicultural Counseling” | Fall 2026, Graduate (On Campus)

Saint Mary’s College of California, Kalmanovitz School of Education, Graduate Counseling Programs | Jan 2023 - Current

Graduate Courses Taught

- Course Title: “Personal and Professional Development of Counselors” | Summer 2023 // Summer 2024, Graduate (Hybrid)
- Course Title: “Intercultural Counseling and Social Justice” | Spring 2023, Graduate (On Campus)

Undergraduate Teaching Experience

- Designing and teaching at the community college level, grounding students in intersectional analysis, critical inquiry, and historically situated frameworks on power, identity, and resistance.
- Facilitate accessible, student-centered learning for diverse and often first-generation student populations, using community-engaged pedagogy, applied reflection, and scaffolded assignments to connect theory to lived experience and social systems.

Contra Costa Community College District, Contra Costa College and Los Medanos College | Fall 2026

- Course Title: “Introduction to LGBTQ Studies” | Fall 2026, Undergraduate (Hybrid)
- Course Title: “Introduction to Race and Ethnicity” | Spring 2027, Undergraduate (On Campus)

Visiting Assistant Professor

Saint Mary’s College of California, School of Science, Psychology | Aug 2023 - July 2024

Undergraduate Teaching Experience

- Designed and taught undergraduate courses at the intersection of psychology, cultural studies, and social justice, emphasizing cross-disciplinary analysis and applied learning.
- Integrated intersectional frameworks into courses on race, social cognition, and global leadership, preparing students for critical engagement in diverse fields.

Institutional Service & Leadership

- Elected Committee Member, School of Science – Expanded interdisciplinary learning through curriculum seminar offerings.
- Co-Chair, Black Liberation Committee – Led initiatives to advance racial equity, student empowerment, and institutional transformation.
- Member, SMC Inclusive Excellence – Designed cross-departmental strategies to foster equity, inclusion, and student engagement.

- Mentored undergraduates in research and praxis, guiding independent projects on identity, power, and community engagement.
- Undergraduate Courses Taught

Course Title: “Topics on Race, Racism, and Ethnicity” | Spring 2024, Undergraduate (On Campus)

Course Title: “Social Psychology” | Spring 2024, Undergraduate (2 sections, On Campus)

Course Title: “Cross-cultural Community Engaged Learning & Leadership” | Fall 2023, Undergraduate (On Campus)

Course Title: “Cross-cultural Psychology” | Fall 2023, Undergraduate (On Campus)

Course Title: “Introduction to Psychology” | Fall 2023, Undergraduate (2 sections, Hybrid)

Doctoral Research And Teaching Fellow, Co-Instructor

Claremont Graduate University, Applied Gender Studies | Community Engaged Education & Social Justice | Transdisciplinary Dept.

Teaching Experience

- Taught graduate courses in cultural studies, gender studies, and social justice education, specializing in transnational feminism, queer and trans studies, and critical theoretical frameworks.
- Designed and facilitated transdisciplinary curricula, integrating intersectional analysis, community-based research, and policy-driven scholarship to prepare students for academic and activist work.
- Led collaborative curriculum development that applied feminist, decolonial, and asset-based pedagogies, emphasizing reflexivity, ethical engagement, and social transformation.
- Mentored M.A. and Ph.D. students in critical research and praxis, guiding them in applying cultural theory, qualitative methods, and community-centered approaches to their scholarship.

Graduate Courses Co-Taught

Course Title: “Queer and Trans People of Color” | Spring 2022 (Virtual)

Course Title: “Transnational Gender Justice and Feminist Solidarity” | Spring 2022 (Virtual)

Course Title: “Critical and Asset-Based Theoretical Frameworks in Education” | Spring 2022 (Virtual)

Course Title: “An Introduction to Community Engaged Education and Social Change” | Fall 2021 (Virtual)

Course Title: “Critical and Asset-Based Theoretical Frameworks in Education” | Spring 2021 (Virtual)

Course Title: "Transdisciplinary Pedagogy for Ethical Education" | Fall 2020 (Virtual)

*CONSULTING

Principal Consultant | Healing, Liberation, And Belonging Strategist

Twalo / Rhyzara | April 2024 - Current

- Strategic consulting in training, mediation, assessment, and policy reform to advance equity and inclusion in schools and nonprofits.
- Design and deliver professional development on DEIB, equipping professionals with practical, actionable tools for addressing burnout.
- Conduct organizational audits and assessments to identify systemic barriers, providing data-driven solutions for sustainable change.
- Facilitate mediation and conflict resolution using restorative and transformative justice principles to address organizational challenges and improve workplace culture.

Districtwide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator

West Sonoma County Union High School District

- Authored a comprehensive 100-Day DEI Plan and Equity Audit that served as the blueprint for the district’s subsequent 2024 DEI Framework (*board-approved*), centering extensive community and student input.
- Developed critical DEI resources—including a trans-inclusive schools guide, a restorative reentry process, and a digital incident reporting system—to ensure long-term, trackable progress toward equity goals.
- Led DEI coaching, student forums, and reflexive Common Planning Time (CPT) workshops, equipping educators and students with actionable tools for equity, cultural competence, and restorative practices.
- Strengthened Title VI, Title IX, and Title II compliance by establishing consistent anti-discrimination reporting protocols, supported staff in mandated procedures, and developing user-friendly “Know Your Rights” resources for students.

Senior Consultant | Community Engagement & Evaluation

The Center for Critical Mentoring and Youth Work

- Developed and implemented critical mentoring models that challenge traditional power dynamics, centering youth agency, abolitionist principles, and transformative justice.
- Designed and facilitated research-based resources on anti-racist youth work, intersectional mentoring, and community-based leadership development.
- Advised organizations on innovative systemic change strategies, including equitable funding models, power redistribution, and policy reform for sustainable youth leadership.
- Conducted qualitative and participatory action research, using data-driven insights to drive institutional shifts toward liberation and belonging.

*LEADER

Sr. Director of Culture and Social Justice

Associated Students, San Francisco State University

- Managed a \$500K budget for six cultural resource centers; Richard Oakes Multicultural Center (ROMC), the ROMC Library and Archives, Art Gallery, Education & Referral Organization for Sexuality, Queer & Trans Resource Center, Women’s Center, and their respective libraries, internship programs, and programming.
- Supervised and developed staff across multiple centers, including directors, assistant directors, and office assistants, ensuring effective leadership and student-centered program delivery.
- Led short- and long-term strategic planning, addressing staffing, hiring, financial oversight, and policy development to strengthen equity-driven institutional support.
- Designed and implemented intersectional DEI initiatives, translating student development theory, critical mentoring, and anti-racism frameworks into practice to remove barriers to participation and staff retention.

Interim Assistant Director

Pomona College, Queer Resource Center of Claremont Colleges

- Co-managed a \$350K budget for LGBTQ+ programming, expanding outreach and increasing BIPOC student engagement.
- Redesigned and facilitated professional development workshops rooted in critical queer theories, equipping faculty, staff, and students with actionable DEI strategies.
- Led the strategic development of an inclusive restroom initiative, successfully advising campus leadership on accessibility and equity-driven infrastructure improvements.
- Revamped and scaled a 6-month mentorship program, developing scaffolded training, targeted marketing, and outreach to strengthen support for LGBTQ+ students.

*COUNSELOR

Interim Head Counselor - Dean of Students

San Francisco Unified School District, Dr. Martin Luther King Middle School

- Led school-wide student success initiatives, overseeing the middle school promotion ceremony, honor roll recognition, and PBIS station operations to improve student achievement and retention.
- Developed and implemented culturally responsive, multi-tiered intervention systems (RTI & MTSS), integrating ASCA and restorative justice models to enhance school climate, discipline practices, and social-emotional learning.
- Founded and directed the school’s first Black Student Union (BSU), launched the inaugural Black Cultural Graduation, and expanded leadership pathways for historically marginalized students.
- Oversaw student support services and behavioral interventions, including IEPs, crisis management, in-class push-in counseling, and family engagement strategies to reduce discipline referrals and increase student well-being.
- Collaborated with district leadership and community partners to improve student services, implement best practices in school discipline, and secure resources for student success initiatives.

credentials

education

Doctor of Philosophy, Education (Urban Leadership & Cultural Studies Concentration)

Claremont Graduate University | Aug 2019 - Aug 2023

- Dissertation Research: "School-to-Death Nexus," Anti-Blackness, & "Life-Giving Schools"
- Focus on educational transformation, abolitionist pedagogy, and systemic change in urban education.
- Developed expertise in institutional accountability, policy reform, and anti-oppressive leadership strategies.

Master of Arts, Cultural Studies

Claremont Graduate University | Aug 2020 - May 2022

- Specialized in critical theory and gender justice, analyzing cultural systems, digital archiving, and power structures.
- Master's Thesis/Project: "Black Gender Liberation Project: an Afrotransfuturist Digital Humanities Archive of Possibility & Praxis"

Master of Arts, Counseling Psychology

University of San Francisco | May 2017 – Dec 2019

- Dual-Track: School Counseling, Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential / Professional Clinical Counseling (APCC)
- Trained in counseling, crisis response, and culturally responsive therapeutic practices across K-12, clinical, and community settings.

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology / Sociology (Criminology and Deviance)

California State University, Stanislaus | May 2011 – Dec 2015

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Featured Projects & Contracts

- “Anti-Oppressive Organization Transformation Initiative” | West County Health Centers, Youth Services Program | January 2024
- “YEEE! Youth Program DEI Evaluation” | San Mateo County Office of Education & Police Activities League | August 2023
- “Equity Audit: District-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Planning” | West Sonoma County Union HS District | March 2023
- “Restorative Reentry Planning: Suspension, Expulsion, and Truancy” | West Sonoma County Union HS District | January 2023
- “Critical Mentoring: Elements for Effective Practice” | MENTOR | July 2022
- “Mentoring Program Audit: (Re)building and (Co)creating a Centering Critical Mentoring Program” | American Medical Student Association, AMSA National | February 2022

Key Presentations & Guest Lectures

- “Unpacking the White Supremacy Culture Hiding Behind Your Imposter Syndrome” | The California Association of School Counselors (CASC) Conference | October 2023
- “Counselor Strategies for Leading Social Change with Youth Activists” | The California Association of School Counselors (CASC) Conference | October 2023
- “Critical Reflections on Radical Embodiment in Health Care” | AMSA National | December 2022
- “Nurturing and sustaining ourselves in academia, professionalism, and beyond”, Sista Citizen, Keynote, Feb 2022
- “Building Life-Giving Schools: Stepping into Your Calling as Abolitionist, Afro-Futurist, and Liberatory School Professionals” | Claremont Graduate University | May 2022
- “Gender, Sexuality, and Social Change: Towards a Model of Liberation, Radical Reimagination, and Freedom Dreams” | Claremont Graduate University | May 2022
- “The Power and Purpose of Divesting from Gender”, 11th Annual Women’s Conference, “Redefining Feminism: An Intersectional Approach”, Associated Students Women’s Center, California State University, San Francisco, Opening Keynote Speaker | March 2022
- “Examining Praxis and Pedagogies of Policing” | Claremont Graduate University | November 2020
- “Radical Black Trans Feminist Frameworks” | Claremont Graduate University | October 2020

Highlighted Facilitated Workshops & Publications

- “CPT Workshop Series: Critical Introspection & Action-Oriented Planning for Teachers” | Analy High School | February 2023
- “Tools for Nonprofit Community Evaluation and Impact” | Youth Mentoring Action Network | January 2023
- “Critical Concepts, Contexts, & Conversations for Organizations” | Big Brothers Big Sisters of America | December 2022
- “Finding Your Joy: Tools to Restore Balance” | Campaign for College Opportunity | May 2022
- “Resource Guide: Responding to School Shootings” | Big Brothers Big Sisters of America | December 2021
- “Pronouns 101 Training & Nurturing Your LGBTQ+ Inclusive Practices Workbook” | AMI Kids | June 2021
- “Relationship Responders: Building Organization-wide Incident Response Teams to Racial Trauma and Community Violence” | Big Brothers Big Sisters of America | May 2021

Selected Student Papers and Presentations

- “Black Queer (Dis)assemblages: Disability, Madness, and Ableism” | Claremont Graduate University | April 2022
- “Unpacking Feminism 101: Gender Liberation as Our Collective Being” | University of La Verne | April 2022
- “Quaring Mentoring: A Literature Review on Mentoring Black LGBTQ+ Graduate Students” | Research Paper | July 2021
- “Intent Over Impact: On Accountability and Devil Advocates in the University Classroom” | Student Paper | April 2021
- “Anti-White Supremacy Culture Classrooms” | Claremont Graduate University | February 2021
- “Black Feminist Reimaginings of Zoom Classrooms” | Claremont Graduate University | December 2020
- “Gender Liberatory Classrooms” | Claremont Graduate University | December 2020
- “Five Mindsets for Agile and Inclusive Education” | Claremont Graduate University | August 2020
- “Whole-School Approach to Critiquing White Supremacy in Deeper Learning for Racial Equity” | Student Paper | May 2020
- “Districts Utilizing Local Control Funding Formulas (LCFF) for Racial Equity” | Student Paper | October 2019

Community Engagement & Event Programming Leadership

- Organized & Hosted: 1st Annual Activism & Advocacy Volunteerism Fair & BBQ | Saint Mary’s College of CA | 30 Community Partners | May 2024 | 1,160 attendees
- Conceptualized & Coordinated: Community Lessons on Social Justice: Student Led Workshops and Presentations | Saint Mary’s College of CA | April 2024
- Co-organized & Featured Facilitator: “Do the Work: Anti-Racism & Intersectionality” with W. Kamau Bell & Kate Schatz | Pre-event: Fireside, Main: Keynote & Q&A, Post-event: Book Signing | Saint Mary’s College of CA | March 2024 | 487 attendees
- Black Liberation Coalition Co-chair & Organizer: 44 Days of Black History and Culture Campus-wide Event Series | 44 Events – 14 Cross Campus Collaborations | Saint Mary’s College of CA | Feb - May 2024
- Co-created & Facilitated: “Black Joy & Radically Pouring into Ourselves” with Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan | Claremont Graduate University | May 2022
- Curated & Facilitated: “Black Excellence is Black Wellness” with Dr. Angel Jones | Claremont Graduate University | May 2021