

Profiles of the Developers of The Undergraduate Toolkit

Condensed business profile of Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC
Empowering through Education, Research and Science



Dr Layla Cassim is a pharmacist by training, and holds a PhD (Pharmacology) as well as an MBA (with distinction) and Diplomas in Dementia Awareness (with distinction), Ayurvedic Herbalism (with distinction) and Feline First Aid (with distinction). She is the owner and managing member of Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC, which specialises in providing support to postgraduate students and researchers.



Layla facilitates various research-related capacitation training workshops at different universities and research bodies across South Africa, such as the University of Limpopo, Nelson Mandela University, Stellenbosch University, University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria, University of Zululand, Vaal University of Technology, UNISA, the CSIR, the Central University of Technology, NECSA, SANBI and the Eastern Cape Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform.

She also conducts a number of public training workshops and writing retreats for postgraduate students and researchers. Layla provides academic writing assistance and editing services, and has provided feedback to more than 500 postgraduate students and researchers across diverse disciplines on their theses, proposals, papers and funding applications.

Layla's flagship product, which she has developed, is the Postgraduate Toolkit®. The Toolkit covers the entire research process and aims to assist postgraduate students across disciplines and at different levels of study to complete their research projects. The first edition was launched in November 2011, the second edition in August 2015, the third edition in December 2017 and the current fourth edition in January 2021. To date, more than 15 000 postgraduate students and researchers across Africa have used the Toolkit and the product has received very positive feedback, both within South Africa and the wider SADC region. The Toolkit has been launched at UNISA, Monash University, the University of Johannesburg, Durban University of Technology and Vaal University of Technology, and has been exhibited at the National Research Foundation's SA PhD Project conferences.





The University of Limpopo has also secured a license to make the Toolkit available on its intranet to all staff and students. For further information, please see www.laylacassim.co.za. Layla has been a reviewer for the South African Pharmaceutical Journal and for the National Research Foundation in its Thuthuka programme, as well as the lead author on the Grant application writing module for the Association of Commonwealth Universities in its STARS (Structured Training for African Researchers) programme.

Layla conducts a structured, online, 12-month Mentorship and Coaching programme for emerging researchers and postgraduate students. This programme includes two mentoring meetings a month, individual academic writing assistance and editing, as well as progress checks in meeting identified research goals. Participants on this mentoring programme are also able to attend one of her public workshops and writing retreats at no cost.

Layla is a co-author of The Undergraduate Toolkit®, which has been launched in April 2022. Some of her chapters from the Postgraduate Toolkit, which are relevant to students across the board, have been adapted for users of The Undergraduate Toolkit.

Condensed business profile of The Renaissance Network



The Renaissance Network (TRN), founded in 1999, is a Black, female-owned South African Human Resources and Labour Law consultancy with a staff complement of highly qualified professionals and a well-capacitated team of Black and female business associates who are also in the Small, Medium, Micro Enterprises (SMME) sector offering outstanding professional services in their areas of expertise and specialisation. TRN has a proud track record primarily in the field of research and diagnostic services, undergraduate and postgraduate capacitation and development, organisational climate and culture audits, policy/ strategy review, management and Human Resources consulting, skills development and capacitation, mentorship and coaching, labour law and labour relations, disability management, anti-corruption, governance and business ethics, workplace transformation; as well as organisational development in South Africa. The Renaissance Network is a fully accredited Training Service Provider with the Services SETA.



Ms Kudsiya Cassim is the Founder of The Renaissance Network. She holds a BA degree, the Advanced Executive Programme and numerous business-related qualifications. She has extensive experience and expertise in the field of Human Resource management, Skills development and Management consulting. Her passion for people and organisational development is a primary motivator in how she conducts her business, and her long-standing





clients in both the public and private sectors bear testimony to the strong sense of partnership and professional service that drives her business relationships. Kudsiya's keen interest in social investment in youth development was demonstrated in her business publishing two youth anthologies in 2000 and 2003, namely *Celebrating Youth Awakenings* (Vol 1 & 2).

Against the background of providing specialist mentorship, academic and research development training workshops to Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, Kudsiya identified a critical need for the accelerated career development of young academics and researchers, especially those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a parent to a postgraduate student (Layla) at Master's level in 2005, she struggled to source relevant support material on academic writing skills at local bookshops. This frustration contributed to the innovative idea of developing a user-friendly guide for postgraduate students covering a range of topics that will empower them to improve their academic writing and research skills and thereby enhance their research output. This led to Dr Layla Cassim compiling the first edition of the *Postgraduate Toolkit* in 2011. Kudsiya believed that this humble initiative would serve as a value-adding contribution to postgraduate success in the higher education and research landscape in South Africa and the African continent.

Eleven years after the launch of the *Postgraduate Toolkit*®, which is now in its 4th edition, The Renaissance Network (TRN) and Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC have jointly developed *The Undergraduate Toolkit*®. Mr Rieaz Cassim, who is a senior researcher at TRN, undertook desktop research on this project which led to the content areas that were decided upon. In addition, he authored Chapters Two and Ten of this Toolkit; the former is a personal account of his own higher education journey. He also contributed to Chapter 9 of the Toolkit.

This new Toolkit has been further enriched by insightful personal and professional testimonies shared by a number of experienced professionals in various professions as well as by early to maturing career professionals who all “had a story to tell”. Two very relevant chapters authored by Dr Meryl du Plessis and Dr Edna Rooth have been included in this Toolkit in order to enhance the diverse learning experiences of its users.

It is hoped that this Undergraduate Toolkit follows closely in the steps of its predecessor and makes a value-adding contribution to graduate development, whilst also offering key stakeholders involved in higher educational initiatives, in all sectors of society, an additional resource to complement their commendable social investment endeavours.





Ms Evangeline (Sharyn) David

Senior Graphic Designer: B&W Print Consultants (Durban)

I have over 30 years experience in the field of design, layout and typesetting. I began at the age of 15 tinkering with Coreldraw 1 on my brother's computer to do layouts for school projects and I have grown with the programme as Coreldraw advanced its software over the years. Due to financial constraints when I completed my schooling, I decided to continue helping my brother in his print business. Having mastered both Coreldraw and Photoshop whilst still at school, I took over the graphic design responsibilities of B&W Print Consultants.

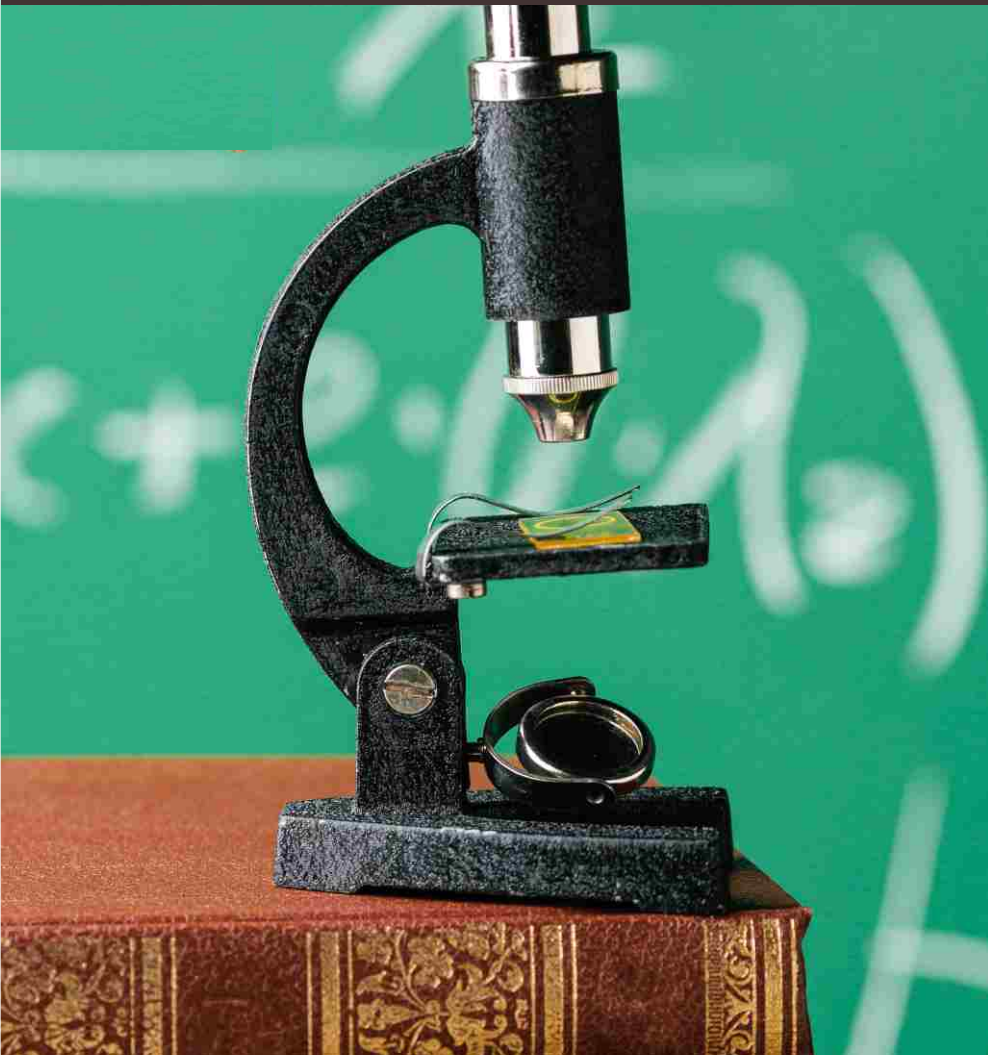
Having been tasked with the design of The Undergraduate Toolkit, I quickly caught onto the vision of the Cassim family to bring such an exceptional aid to our young learners in South Africa. As a designer, the content made me excited and I threw everything I had into making sure we have a product that is both user friendly and visually appealing for students. This Toolkit is produced in South Africa so it felt right to give it an African flavour. It is my hope as a designer that students will find navigating the Toolkit easy and exciting.

I had an amazing team to work with. It made designing this Toolkit a pleasure and a privilege. It is very rare for a designer to work with people who know exactly what they want and can articulate that vision to you. Everything you see in the Toolkit is a wonderful collaboration of ideas, like the quotations that are peppered inside the Toolkit. The design for these quotations is, as far as I know, a unique way to do them and we hope you enjoy this visual break throughout the Toolkit while being inspired by the words of people who have contributed to society.

B&W Print Consultants is a family-owned business operating out of Durban. We do work for companies all across South Africa and have a reputation for fast and reliable service. We are a fully equipped printing press having both lithographic and digital presses. We are able to take a job from design to final product in record time and have built up a faithful client base. We specialise in book production, business and medical stationery, signage, banners and all forms of print media.

Reviews and Reflections

(These reviews have not been edited to maintain authenticity)





Prof. Leila Kajee, PhD

Professor of Education at a South African University

The tertiary journey is coveted by many students as a path to personal and career fulfilment, yet it is one often fraught with trepidation. Dr Layla Cassim and her team at The Renaissance Network address concerns impacting students in this Undergraduate Toolkit. The Toolkit is thoughtfully designed to facilitate entry into and success in the complex world of postschool study.

Its predecessor, the Postgraduate Toolkit, now in its 4th edition, has received praise and recommendation from postgraduate students nationally and on the African continent. The Undergraduate Toolkit, designed as an additional resource to other tools that may be provided in students' learning environments, offers a range of psychologically and intellectually beneficial tools and advice to assist the transition from school to university, such as in addressing life challenges that may undermine academic progress, time management, and attaining work-life balance. In addition, the Toolkit introduces basic research principles, valuable tips to improve reading and writing, as well as learning and study skills, mentorship, and personal and professional development.

Useful guidelines are provided to students on the use of the library, an orientation to professional bodies and preparing for the transition from university life to the working environment. Universities are also advised on making adequate provision for students with disabilities so that an improved learning environment promotes inclusivity and a respect for the rights of all students.

In addition, the Toolkit highlights the powerful role of key stakeholders within the institutions of higher education as well as other sectors of society in actively supporting the provision of adequate learning resources for successful graduate development.

This Toolkit, intended as it is to capacitate students towards the successful achievement of their academic goals, is a significant and inspiring resource in the postschool arena.

Dr Jayanathan Govender

School of Social Sciences, University of Kwazulu-Natal

Visiting Fellow: Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Study, New Delhi

Visiting Fellow: Department of Sociology, Sivaji University, Kolhapur

International Faculty and Faculty Board Advisor, Chandigarh University, Punjab

Member: South African Sociological Society

Member: International Sociological Society

I reviewed Dr Layla Cassim's Postgraduate Toolkit just over ten years ago, which is now currently in its 4th edition. The accomplishment of the Postgraduate Toolkit is phenomenal and very much evident from the training workshops conducted by Dr Cassim annually, as well as from the sale and demand of the online/ USB version of the Postgraduate Toolkit.



Dr Cassim is commended for creating an intellectual liminal space in the higher education sector for a fortunate number of higher education students. Intellectual liminality is the quality of becoming (excellent students that is). In my opinion, Dr Cassim's work shares the philosophical and post-colonial platforms of Henri Lefebvre and Homi Bhabha respectively. All three (Lefebvre, Homi Bhabha and Cassim) have imagined intellectual spaces that give deep meaning to representativeness, newness and change, the proper stuff of higher education.

On this occasion, I am most pleased to review "The Undergraduate Toolkit", which assuredly is an adjunct of intellectual liminality I refer to above. The Undergraduate Toolkit (developed by Dr Layla Cassim and The Renaissance Network) must be a world-first, within the field of pedagogics. World-wide, the field faces demographic, institutional, economic, and technological changes. The most asked question is its relevant for a rapidly transforming world that is on the cusp of the 4th (Industry 4.0) and 5th (Society 5.0) Industrial Revolutions.

In South Africa, the practical challenges of the field are: under-preparedness; limited access; shrinking financial assistance; and teaching/technological methodologies under conditions of the COVID-19 polypandemic. The fundamental challenge of the field is the lack of a causal relationship between the field and the labour market.





Reading “The Undergraduate Toolkit” was mesmeric it is a self-education toolkit par excellence. “The Undergraduate Toolkit” answered all of my issues and challenges about the field in the context of South Africa. “The Undergraduate Toolkit” precedes the field instructionally. While “The Undergraduate Toolkit” is not encyclopedic of the disciplines and programmes taught by preeminent academics and professors, it does guide the young mind towards making good choices. It avails the student to access factual knowledge; conceptual knowledge; procedural knowledge; metacognitive knowledge; *a priori* knowledge; and a *posteriori* knowledge.

“The Undergraduate Toolkit” gathers together the learning and teaching traditions and wisdoms of the best ranked universities, in both the north and south, which have produced the best graduates, professionals and practitioners. Any student, can compare to the students of top universities, if they utilize “The Undergraduate Toolkit” committedly, purposively and ethically.

The Toolkit also calls for the support of universities and other public and private institutions. I am optimistic that there is room for such support, given the hard challenges faced by succeeding young generations.

Accordingly, as a follower of the excellence of The Renaissance Network and Layla Cassim ERS Consultants CC, I endorse “The Undergraduate Toolkit” and recommend it to every first-year and continuing student aspiring to graduate with honour from South Africa's and Africa's public and private higher education institutions.

Warm regards.



Dr Philani Nongogo, PhD

Ph.D (Human Movement Science — University of Pretoria)
Senior Lecturer in Kinesiology & Coaching Sciences,
Tshwane University of Technology

A Story of Transition from a Student to an Academic: A story of successes and milestones reached, at particular phases of my tertiary studies



I always believe that all those who have had the privilege of making it through tertiary studies and acquired their undergraduate degrees, even if it is just that only qualification, have a STORY to tell.

Of course, these stories take a different form and/ or texture. Yes, the basic fundamentals of tertiary studying and education in South Africa might generally be the same. These fundamentals might even be more similar when one looks at issues of the social milieu one is a product of: for example, studying at an institution that has a history of being disadvantaged poses complex and peculiar socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges compared to studying at a historically advantaged institution.

So, it is very important to never take things around you for granted and or fail to understand others' challenges and difficulties. In short, this means context is everything; empathy and compassion are key, when one analyses issues such as lack of funding in the tertiary education space. The broad difficulty to survive at a tertiary institution, therefore, follows logically. This hardship might include, but not be limited to, access to adequate nutrition, clothing, books and other related and pertinent study material. Those issues that might appear so obvious and easy to reach and access in my institution might just be a mountain to climb for other students from other backgrounds and/ or those at other institutions.

Yes, there has been the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) since the mid-90s and now it is called the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). These funding tools and mechanism have not always been there, and even when the former was introduced, there were cumbersome and stringent rules for accessing such funding. I am the product of TEFSA and I can confidently declare that without that government and/ or tax-payers' money, I might not have survived and afforded exorbitant fees and provision towards my tertiary education





The present dispensation of limited “free education” is a new phenomenon and it did not come cheap and easy. The present dispensation came about after a long struggle and sacrifices made by students, specifically those from historically disadvantaged institutions. The now easily banded around campaigns, hashtags and/ or slogans of “fees-must-fall”, with many simply climbing on the bandwagon, however important, are no NEW struggles!

I cannot count how many times the students from the University of Fort Hare, University of the Transkei (now part of Walter Sisulu University), University of the Western Cape, Turfloop (now University of Limpopo), MEDUNSA (now Sefako Makgatho University), and many others, have taken to the streets, and others even died, fighting for the right to study and survive tertiary education. Our struggles were real in the true sense of the word, unlike the recent “struggles” — “NSFAS pay-up because we've got bills”, which were often about delayed payments of NSFAS allowances. Of course, as the old adage goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same — in the past, while others were fighting for parking bays (at Rhodes, UCT, Wits, Stellenbosch, TUKS, etc.), we had no vehicles and therefore our struggles were about real survival, fees, food, books and general survival at tertiary institutions — these were the “bread and butter” issues.

Yes, of course the twenty-first century student struggles, challenges and the broader context might have changed, yet one thing that has 'stood the test of time' is that, while accepting the privilege of being at a tertiary institution — to pass and succeed in their chosen careers is still a primarily revolutionary goal — the country needs a hugely diverse skilled youth. This is a national call and national service. All students should view tax-payers' money as serious investment. They should view academic success as mandatory for all of them.

My goal as a student, a relatively poor one for that matter, was always to pass with flying colours such that whoever comes along to fund my studies would never be discouraged by my mediocre academic performance, but only be encouraged to offer even more assistance. So, my academic success was my full-time campaign for scholarship and/ or any possible support I could get. All students can still take this approach to their tertiary education, for there is nothing to lose at passing and passing well — but only pride and joy.

Yes, not all students require degrees and loads of theory; South Africa needs a lot of artisans and entrepreneurs from TVET colleges and other tertiary education setups to succeed as a progressively developmental state. What is critical for any student is to choose a fulfilling career and do their best at achieving success when studying for it. In my undergraduate studies, passing with distinctions was the most fulfilling goal ever.



My parents, throughout my schooling, never asked the question whether I had passed or not but “how well I have done this time around?” Consequently, I have never repeated a single subject throughout my undergraduate (a four-year programme — and I voluntarily enrolled for four major subjects) and postgraduate studies. I completed my studies in allotted periods. While I was still busy with my postgraduate qualification (Master's programme and serving as a Junior Research Fellow), I was offered a part-time junior lecturer position owing to my superior work ethic and high-end achiever predisposition. When I was studying towards the Honours degree, I won two scholarships towards the Honours in Sport Science programme — The NRF Award and the Dean's Scholarship. I also attained two scholarships towards the Master's programme — the prestigious Cannon Collins and the NRF's Govan Mbeki Junior Research Fellow.

Lastly, I won several prestigious scholarships from national and international research entities (the National Research Foundation (NRF), the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympic Studies Centre and the IOC's Olympic Academy). My transition from a tertiary student to an academic was, to me, seamless and this I attributed to hard work and superior academic achievement. I am aware that my story is not necessarily unique but what is critical is the common denominator — hard work, which leads to superior academic success. A working class youth that grew up in the dusty streets of Mdantsane, outside East London, born from a pensioner and subsistence farmer mother, is now a senior lecturer with six postgraduate certificates, four from international institutions. You, as an undergraduate student and/ or postgraduate student, you can achieve this feat too.

This Undergraduate Toolkit, which I have had the privilege to review, is a value-add. This timely resource will escalate your academic, career and personal development journey. Exploit it fully so that you reap all its benefits on a personal and professional level. The balance that is needed for optimal success with your studies lies in how you juggle your academic development, career, family, home and other social responsibilities so that you may advance to your full potential. This Toolkit offers you numerous self-enrichment opportunities for growth and development.

The African continent, and South Africa specifically, calls upon all of us to make distinct contributions to human and societal upliftment towards a solid foundation of hope and progress for generations to come.



Mr Bongani Makhathini

Senior Project Manager
Director: The Research and Information Hub
Mictert Marketing Research

We, at Mictert Marketing Research, are happy to endorse the Undergraduate Toolkit that follows the highly successful Postgraduate Toolkit developed by Dr Layla Cassim in 2011. We are a market research and fieldwork specialist agency founded in 1997 by Mr Vusi Makhathini, now the company's CEO. We have worked together with Dr Cassim over many years, and can attest to her outstanding profile both as an entrepreneur and a graduate and postgraduate development specialist, learning programme developer/ trainer and mentor. We have also built a close business relationship with The Renaissance Network that commenced in 2017 when we conducted fieldwork for them on a national public sector research study.



We are pleased to be invited to offer our appraisal of The Undergraduate Toolkit. We wish the users of this Undergraduate Toolkit all the best as they tap into it to build their confidence, knowledge and skills to make a success of their academic and research-related studies.

At the undergraduate level of education, all the topics covered in this Toolkit are most relevant to empower and develop students on many levels: namely, personal, academic, research and professional levels. An entire chapter on: “An Introduction to the World of Research” is most relevant to undergraduate students as it exposes them to a critical competency that needs to be developed at an early stage of the academic and research journey for a student to progress well into their professional careers and also to hopefully elevate to the postgraduate level.

Another most useful tool in this Toolkit is the Undergraduate Learning and Development Contract, which is in essence a personal and professional development plan that tracks a student's growth in many facets of their life, and serves as a life plan that strives to balance the individual/ home/ work/ studies and career. This tool is invaluable for planning, goal setting and tracking one's progress. It becomes a robust roadmap for undergraduate and career success on one's entire career management pathway.



The focus on the invaluable role of the library, academic writing, reading, learning and study guidelines with practical exercises in dedicated chapters in this Toolkit is much needed for students to master so that they reach their tertiary education goals. The chapter authored by Dr Edna Rooth on “Self-management for Success”, expands on life skills needed for a well-balanced student life. The Wellbeing and Self-care chapter cannot be emphasised enough as so much of student success is dependent on one's mental, emotional and physical well-being.

The role of mentors who can guide students to sharpen their knowledge, skills and educational outlook is well covered in a stand-alone chapter that is enlightening and resourceful to both mentors and mentees. The inclusion of a chapter on Disability is most commendable. It promotes the rights of students with disabilities and also advises university management, policy-makers and administrators on their role in making reasonable accommodation available to those who need it with relevant support systems and resources.

It is commendable that the Toolkit also offers guidance to students on the importance of getting to know their professional bodies whilst they are still studying, so that they become conversant with stringent professional registration criteria that they will need to meet once their formal academic studies are over and they enter the workplace. This links up well with the advice offered in the chapter on “Preparing for the Passage into the World of Work” as it serves as a bridge between university and the future employer of the student. The outreach of this Toolkit covers the student entering the academic space, building skills and knowledge as their studies progress, and then it capacitates the graduate taking their first steps into their employment. A full cycle is presented for learning, growth, self-development and the transition into employment.

We believe that this Toolkit is a MUST for all students, in South Africa and on the continent, irrespective of the type of academic qualifications they are striving for. It serves as a resourceful companion that offers success tips, motivation, advice and practical hands-on opportunities for students to introspect, think critically, analyse their study habits and become more aware of themselves so that they understand themselves and their academic journey well.

We wish all the students who are users of this Toolkit a successful tertiary education and transition into the workplaces of their choice.

Warm regards.

