



200HR Circle Yoga Teacher Training

2023-24 Lead and Guest Trainers

Lead Trainers



Alex Phelan, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT

Alex (she/her) has been teaching yoga since 2009 and completed over 1,000 teaching hours. In 2017, Alex helped to launch the 200HR Circle Yoga Teacher Training. In her role as teacher trainer, she is passionate about providing trainees with the skills they need to offer yoga beyond the confines of a traditional studio or gym setting. This includes understanding the anatomical basis for asana in a holistic, mindful and balanced way. Alex is also a certified Yoga Therapist with a Masters of Science in Yoga Therapy from the Maryland University of Integrative Health. As a yoga therapist she works to ensure that each student or client is offered a balanced practice that is appropriately challenging and matched to their needs and goals.



Julie Holly, E-RYT 500

Julie (she/her) believes that yoga is life-affirming, fun and a tool to deepen compassion, empathy and social justice. She is a student, practitioner and teacher of Rajanaka yoga and her asana philosophy is rooted in biomechanics, serving the individual needs of her students. In addition to being an E-RYT 500, YACEP, Julie is a NASM Certified Personal Trainer and Nutrition Coach, a Certified Cancer Exercise Specialist and a graduate of Howard University. She has been teaching yoga since 2010 and her students range in age from three to 85 and benefit from her knowledge, humor and passion for yoga. She will be releasing her first book *Breath by Breath: A Journey of Yoga & Loss* in the autumn of 2023. When she isn't practicing yoga she is living it by planting a sustainable garden, hanging with her rescue dog, Malcolm, and cooking delicious, plant-based meals.



Kellie Finn, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT

Kellie (she/her) is thrilled to be joining the CYTT team for the 2023-24 program, and excited to meet the curiosity of incoming students hungry to learn more about this powerful philosophy for living. Though she started yoga in 1991, she still (often) finds herself amazed by the metamorphosis these practices offer. She participated in her first yoga teacher training in 2001, following two years of study at Kripalu. Since then she has taught and worked therapeutically in studios, wellness collectives, chiropractic offices, colleges and universities, hospitals, gyms, eating disorder programs, community centers, and private practice. In 2016, she completed her MS in Yoga Therapy at Maryland University of Integrative Health, where she currently works as adjunct faculty. Kellie loves creating curriculum that fosters intrigue, reverence, discernment, self-understanding, presence, and community. She believes these practices are meant to be lived, and that learning to embody them is a lifelong journey that brings increasing authenticity, freedom, and joy.



Philip Bender, E-RYT 500

Phil (he/him) teaches yoga and meditation to facilitate greater joy and confidence in the lives of beginners and experienced practitioners alike. Not above tossing in a show tune, Phil has a lighthearted approach that honors traditional spiritual insights while making them accessible. Since 2015, Phil has been a co-teacher of YTT and AYTT at Anne Arundel Community College and Blue Lotus Yoga in Raleigh, NC. He teaches weekly for the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Circle Yoga and Willow Street Yoga, and offers courses at Montgomery College's Lifelong Learning Institute. He also hosts popular noontime and morning meditations via Zoom.

An initiate of the Himalayan tradition, Phil currently draws inspiration from the somatic work of Reginald Ray, Kamini Desai, Les Fehmi, Rod Stryker, Judith Blackstone, among others. In addition to yoga certifications, Phil is certified as an Integrated Amrit Yoga Nidra teacher, a Member of Buteyko Professionals International and currently completing requirements to become a Certified Focusing Professional.

Guest Trainers



Denise A. Alston, PhD, E-RYT 500

Yoga Nidra

Denise (she/her) completed her 200-hour Kripalu teacher training in 2003. She later found a home for her continued learning with the Sri Vidya Tantra-based Himalayan tradition and received a 500-hour certificate in 2015. Over the years, she has expanded her spiritual palette to include an Ayurveda Yoga Specialist certificate from the Himalayan Institute. She also completed a 40-hour training and immersion in Yoga Nidra and participates in the Empowered Life Circle community led by Tracee Stanley. She continues to study and practice meditation with Craig Hamilton and explore yoga philosophy with Sally Kempton. Currently, she is pursuing further training as a Yoga Wellness Educator with a special emphasis on functional aging. Denise's ongoing commitment to her own growth and development and that of new yoga teachers has led her to serve as a mentor through the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance.



Michelle Brooks, RYT 500

Safe Spaces for Larger-Bodied Yogis

Michelle (she/they) has been teaching movement since the mid 1990s when she was certified as a step aerobics and weight training teacher. A friend introduced her to yoga 15 years ago and when faced with challenges as a larger bodied yogi, Michelle began to attend classes at Circle taught by Annie Carlin Olle and then decided to offer the same welcoming environment to others. She graduated from RYT 200 (2018) and RYT 300 (2021) training at Circle Yoga and is Curvy Yoga certified. Michelle's classes are infused with a sense of joy and fun and she focuses on mindful movement to connect with and love your body. When she isn't on the mat, she's usually playing with her basset hounds, Boo Radley and Scout.



Anjali Chaturvedi, RYT 500

Bhagavad Gita

Anjali (she/her) started practicing yoga twenty-something years ago as a way to loosen up her legs after her long runs. But yoga soon expanded in her life as she saw how yoga connected body, mind, and spirit. Anjali's curiosity led her to seek her 200-hour RYT certification in 2018, followed by a leadership coaching program that convinced her that connection to our hearts is critical to reaching our potential. In 2020, during the pandemic, Anjali continued her yoga studies and became a 500-hour RYT certified yoga teacher.



Michelle Cohen, RYT 200, CBD

Adapting for Prenatal Students

Michelle (she/her) is a birth doula, an Ayurvedic postpartum doula, and a prenatal and postnatal yoga teacher supporting birthers in the Washington, DC area. She believes strongly that the mind-body tools of yoga, breathwork and meditation can positively impact and support each individual's unique childbearing and birthing transformation. Michelle has been working with families since 2008, teaching hundreds of pregnant and new parents how to holistically connect with their bodies and their babies. She is sustained by her Zen Buddhist meditation practice, which she began when her own two boys were toddlers.



Yael Flusberg, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT

Ethics of Yoga Teaching

Yael (she/her) brings 15 years of experience teaching yoga and 30 years of experience in facilitation, training and coaching with social change organizations and leaders to her work preparing the next generation of outstanding yoga teachers. She has offered her own [50-hour Yin Yoga Teacher Training](#) since 2016, and has served as a guest trainer and mentor for multiple yoga training programs on modules ranging from pranayama and meditation to energetic anatomy and creative themes to ethics, business, and trauma-informed teaching. She was a teaching assistant for the Kripalu's Integrative Yoga Therapy Program around yoga and mental health. Yael sat on the core teaching faculty for Circle Yoga's Advanced 300-hour Teacher Training and is a regular guest trainer for its 200-hour CYTT.



Michelle C. Johnson, LCSW, E-RYT 500

Equity / Skill in Action

Michelle (she/her) is an activist, author, anti-racism consultant and trainer, and yoga teacher and practitioner. She has years of experience as a clinical social worker and has led Dismantling Racism Trainings with large corporations, small non-profits, and community groups—including the Duke University, Google, Kripalu, Yoga Alliance, and Lululemon, and many others—over the last two decades. Michelle published [Skill in Action: Radicalizing Your Yoga Practice to Create a Just World](#) (2017), which is one of the main texts of the 200HR Circle Yoga Teacher Training. She has since published [Finding Refuge](#) (2021), [We Heal Together](#) (2023), and [A Space for Us](#) (2023). In addition to being a guest trainer for the 200HR CYTT and 300HR CYTT, Michelle is a consultant to Circle Yoga's Racial Equity Team.



Leyla Kenny, E-RYT 200

Anatomy

After spending a year-long residency at the Kripalu Center, Leyla (she/her) became a certified yoga instructor in 1998. Leyla has been teaching yoga continuously for over 25 years. A life-long learner, Leyla continues her studies by attending trainings on anatomy, prenatal and postnatal yoga, yoga for aging bodies, and yoga for children. In 2002, she co-founded Capitol Hill Yoga and remained co-owner until 2008. She has been fortunate to teach at a variety of locations and with a variety of people from formerly incarcerated individuals to a former Supreme Court judge. Leyla has been teaching at Circle Yoga since 2010 and is currently serving as the Circle Yoga Board President. Leyla is a professor at Catholic University, a mindfulness instructor at Sibley Hospital, and a psychotherapist.



Sydnea Lewis, RYT 500

Teaching Beginners / The Business of Yoga

Sydnea (she/her) is a passionate and experienced yoga instructor who is dedicated to helping others become skilled yoga teachers. She completed her 300HR yoga certification through Circle Yoga and her 200HR certification through Yoga District, and has since focused on sharing her knowledge and experience with aspiring yoga teachers and practitioners. Sydnea is also certified in several other areas, including Rocket Yoga, Accessible Yoga, and teaching yoga to kids with special needs. Her approach to teaching is warm, welcoming, and accessible, and she is committed to helping her students develop the skills and confidence needed to become effective yoga teachers. Sydnea believes that yoga is for everyone, regardless of age, background, or body type, and is passionate about sharing the benefits of yoga with others.



Matthew Lyons, E-RYT 200

Yoga and Meditation

Inclusivity in Yoga Teaching

Originally from Kalamazoo, Michigan, Matthew (he/him) has lived in the DC area for over 30 years. He began practicing yoga consistently in 2014. After several years of practicing Bikram Yoga, his interests shifted to vinyasa, Yoga Nidra, Yin Yoga, and restorative practices. Matthew completed his RYT-200 training as well as a 100-hour Yin Yoga teaching training in 2017, and has since continued to pursue training in Yoga Nidra, restorative yoga, and sound healing. Matthew brings a calm, mellow vibe into his classes, with the intention of making yoga accessible and fulfilling to each student's body and spirit. He holds a law degree from George Washington University Law School and spent nearly 26 years working on congressional affairs and federal public policy before deciding to dedicate his time and energy to guiding gentle movement practices, meditation, and sound healing.



Annie Mahon, MA, MS, E-RYT 200, RCYT

Mindfulness

Annie (she/they) is a mindfulness author and teacher, ordained [Dharma Teacher in the Plum Village tradition](#), and founder of dharma oriented organizations, including Circle Yoga Cooperative, the [Opening Heart Mindfulness Community](#), the [Making Visible](#) social justice webinar series, and the [Pink House Foundation](#). She offers mindfulness blogs, practice guidance, and other resources at [anniemahon.com](#), and has published two books: [Words to be With](#) (2010) and [Things I Did When I was Hungry](#) (Parallax Press 2015). Annie holds additional certifications in yoga, [Inner Relationship Focusing](#), and massage therapy, and has studied [Nonviolent Communication \(NVC\)](#), trauma informed therapy, and dharma-based anti-racism, and offers guided meditation practices on [YouTube](#) and [Insight Timer](#). She is a two time cancer survivor and aims to celebrate the everyday wonders of life with her beloved family, friends, and terriers, guided by the dharma and her mindfulness practice.



Mercedes Santos, E-RYT 200

Yoga for Seniors

Mercedes (she/her) began practicing yoga 32 years ago and has been teaching both group classes and private yoga sessions for 18. She especially enjoys teaching older students, and has developed programs that include discussion and practices to support a variety of aging-related needs. Using her knowledge of aging, anatomy, therapeutics and pedagogy, she has designed workshops for yoga teachers who have an interest in these topics. Mercedes' commitment to teaching is grounded in her belief that yoga can be valuable and accessible to everyone and that the power of the individual practice is amplified when shared in community.



Alice Wylie, E-RYT 500

Flow Yoga

Alice (she/her) has been teaching yoga since 2004 and is an E-RYT500 through Yoga Alliance. She first discovered yoga 25 years ago when she was dancing professionally and was instantly drawn to the peace of the practice. She believes yoga is one of the greatest gifts in her life, shaping her way of experiencing the world. Sharing a small slice of this vast practice with others is an honor. She received her primary training through Tranquil Space in Washington, DC. Further studies include the Pilates mat training through Quantum Pilates, completion of Dr. Ariele Foster's Yoga Anatomy Training and Jill Miller's Level 1 Yoga Tune Up® Teacher Training in anatomy, biomechanics, and yoga therapeutics led by Laurel Beversdorf. She is thrilled to be part of the CYTT team!