1. What is The Plank Center Fellowship for Educators?

The Plank Center’s mission is to help develop and recognize outstanding diverse public relations leaders, role models and mentors to advance ethical public relations in an evolving, global society. Our founder, the legendary Betsy Plank, known as the First Lady of Public Relations, had a life-long passion for matching educators and professionals so that both would grow together.

We designed the summer fellowship specifically for public relations educators with the dual purpose of exposing professors to current day-to-day operations of the public relations function and to help create an exchange of information and ideas that will enhance the professional development of both the educators and the practitioner-hosts.

2. How do educators qualify to become a summer fellow?

We undertake an application process through which candidates are screened and reviewed by fellow educators who serve as trustees of The Plank Center. As we enter our sixth year of the Fellowship for Educators, approximately 50 educators have been selected to serve. Seven educators selected for 2016 will each spend two full weeks in the offices of the sponsoring organizations drawn from major public relations agencies and corporations.

3. How are host organizations selected?

Throughout the history of this program, a number of outstanding agencies and corporations have participated, including such organizations as General Motors, Harley-Davidson, Sprint, Ketchum, Edelman Worldwide, Deveney Communications, Home Depot, Johnson & Johnson, Golin, ESPN, the American Heart Association and others. Plank Center trustees undertake an outreach to past host organizations and seek to recruit new companies and agencies to join us each year. Our goal always is to recruit the leading organizations that share our deep commitment for leadership and mentoring.

4. What are the specific details of the program?

Educators chosen for 2016 will each spend at least two full weeks in the offices of the sponsoring organizations drawn from major public relations agencies and corporations. During their period of service, the educators will be given a full orientation to the sponsoring organization, a particular department or functional area, staff duties and responsibilities, clients and/or projects.
The host organizations will designate a key professional as the official host and mentor for the visiting professor during their time in residency. In return, the educator will use his/her own expertise to conduct at least one workshop or seminar for the staff of the sponsoring organization; or to conduct a research project of value to the sponsoring organization.

A key facet of this program is the reciprocal nature of the fellowship: When the educator has completed their summer term, they will extend an invitation to their host/mentor to schedule time in 2016 on their college or university campus, during which the host/mentor will be asked to provide a lecture, have lunch or dinner with faculty, and meet with students.

5. What role does the Plank Center play in this program?

The Plank Center is the convener of this opportunity, using its own visibility to draw attention to the program; marketing the program to both educators and organization leaders; and coordinating the application process and “match.”

Dr. Karla Gower, Director, and fellow trustees, Keith Burton and Ron DeFeo, have worked together with other board members to develop and drive the 2016 Fellowship for Educators. They will be available on a continuing basis to help with orientation and program support. Their contact details follow:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Karla Gower</td>
<td>Plank Center and UA</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gower@apr.ua.edu">gower@apr.ua.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Burton</td>
<td>Grayson Emmett Partners</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kburton@graysonemmett.com">kburton@graysonemmett.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron DeFeo</td>
<td>Darden Restaurants</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rdefeo@darden.com">rdefeo@darden.com</a></td>
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6. As an educator, do I have a voice in where I may serve?

Yes, we certainly consider the interests expressed by educator candidates. Based on our experience with educators and host companies through the years, we work carefully to ensure a match based on various considerations – the expressed interests of educators, experience levels in the classroom and in industry, timing issues related to the summer vacation period, geographic placement requirements, among others.

7. As a host organization, do I have a voice in which educators may be “matched” with our needs?

Yes. Organizations with which we've worked often have specific needs – timing a fellowship so that it is not compromised or in conflict with other programs planned; ensuring that the right mentor is available to guide the educator; matching educator skill sets and experience to real-world needs of the host, among others. Host companies often request educators who can join a team and even contribute their
experience in research or consulting on discreet problems or issues – including crisis communication, measurement and evaluation, employee communication, and social and digital media.

8. **How do students benefit?**

A key beneficiary of the Fellowship for Educators is the public relations student, who can be ensured that his/her professors are knowledgeable in the current practices and issues facing practitioners and that practitioners have a greater appreciation for the value of theory and research of their classrooms in today’s public relations work.

Moreover, when the host company’s lead contact or mentor pays a reciprocal visit to their educator’s campus, students and faculty, too, gain exposure and interaction with companies who often are seeking to identify future recruits as a part of their visit.

9. **How is this program funded?**

To participate in the Fellowship for Educators, the host organization is expected to provide for reimbursement of housing and per diem expenses of up to $3,000.00 for the chosen educator. The educator’s college or university will pay for travel to/from the location of the host organization. This is the model we’ve followed through the life of the program and it has worked well. There are no additional costs and The Plank Center receives no payment for its role in the program.

10. **How can I provide feedback on the program?**

Email us and tell us what you think about it. In addition, we’ll be scheduling mid-point check-in calls this summer with our educators and hosts to hear about your progress and specific issues or needs you may have.

Finally – when you have the opportunity, we hope you’ll post entries to LinkedIn via the publisher tool, Twitter (tag us: @PlankCenterPR) or blog about your experience with this program. The more visibility we have, the greater the interest among educators and potential host companies in the future.