

Evaluating Non-Certified Honor Societies

A Checklist for Students, Parents, and College Administrators



If an honor society has not been **certified** as meeting the high standards of the Association of College Honor Societies, there is no guarantee that the organization is truly an honor society. Before accepting an invitation to membership or allowing an organization on your campus, weigh the value of the opportunity carefully. This checklist will help you make that decision.

Top Indicators

that Raise Questions about Credibility

The following items should be considered significant warning signs regarding an honor society's legitimacy. All of the information you need to complete this checklist should be accessible on the group's website.

If any of the following are true, proceed carefully:

- The organization is not a non-profit 501(c)—having a non-profit foundation or arm is not the same as the organization itself being a non-profit.
- Chief Executive Officer contact information, governing bylaws, or other key items are missing from the website.
- The eligibility standards for membership are nonexistent, vague, low, or flexible.
- Members have no say in how the organization is run.
- The organization's contact address is unlisted.
- An online membership application is available—certified honor societies ONLY issue invitations to qualified candidates from institutional chapters.
- There is no institutional chapter structure.

A Look at the Details

I. Minimum Scholastic Criteria

Requirements for membership in a legitimate collegiate honor society will demand high standards of academic achievement. A low bar for membership is indicative of an organization that lacks credibility. Low standards (or no standards) indicate that a group is looking to maximize total membership without regard for quality in an attempt to maximize revenue. In evaluating such an invitation, it is wise to consider whether or not it is an "honor" to belong to a group that will accept anyone willing to pay the membership fees. Here are the minimum standards you should look for in a society's criteria for membership:

	Type of Honor Society	Minimum Academic Level Required
<input type="radio"/>	Generalized: all academic fields	Rank in at least the upper 20% of eligible classifications (In most cases, that would include students with a minimum GPA of 3.50.)
<input type="radio"/>	Specialized field(s) that may or may not include leadership	Rank in at least the upper 35% of eligible classification (In most cases, that would include students with a minimum GPA of 3.30.)

II. Governance

The structure of an organization's governing body can tell you a great deal about *who* the organization truly serves. A lack of membership participation at any of these levels is concerning, as is operating with a for-profit status.

The group's members participate in:

- Setting the authority for control of the affairs of the organization.
- Approving and amending the organization's governing bylaws.

The organization is governed so that:

- Officers/board members are elected by the membership.
- There is full financial disclosure and transparency.
- The organization is recognized as a non-profit under Section 501(c) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

III. Campus Chapters

Legitimate honor societies operate through chapters on individual accredited college campuses or through chapters organized through accredited online colleges. Why? Your institution has access to your academic records, ensuring that invitations are only sent to students who meet high standards for membership. An invitation from an off-campus group will most likely be based upon something other than academic achievement, thus indicating that it is not a genuine honor society.

Invitations received from a group that has no official chapter representation at your school would be considered highly suspicious by ACHS. Membership that does not require *any* invitation is particularly problematic.

Honor Society Chapters are:

- Formally chartered by institution and college/department petition.
- Approved by official action of the governing body of the national organization.
- Represented in national governance.

Campus Chapters perform the following functions:

- Nominate and select new candidates for membership.
- Issue official invitations to membership.
- Conduct programming to enrich and extend their members' educational experience.

IV. Website Guidelines

The following items should be accessible to the general public through the organization's website. Missing items indicate a lack of transparency and raise serious questions about a group's credibility as a legitimate honor society.

A legitimate honor society's website should always list:

- Board Officers and Headquarters Staff
- Headquarters mailing address, phone number, and email address
- Criteria for membership
- Benefits of membership
- Membership fee
- National/international Bylaws
- Chapter chartering policies and procedures