

## How to Judge the Credibility of an Honor Society

Students, parents, and all college and university faculty should beware of predatory organizations that call themselves honor societies without requiring high academic standards for membership. These organizations often charge exorbitant initiation and membership fees. They exist primarily to make a profit, rather than to create opportunities for the students they purport to serve. Some have found ways around privacy laws and invite students via email from a national (non-campus) office, without input from a campus academic advisor to verify that the student would qualify as a high achiever.

If an honor society has not been certified as meeting the high standards of the **Association of College Honor Societies**, examine the following criteria:

### Minimum Scholastic Criteria

- Undergraduate (Specialized and Leadership)—Rank in the upper 35% of the class. That rank converts to a 3.2 or 3.3 GPA in most cases; 3.0 is likely too low in this age of grade inflation. Honor societies that advertise a minimum 3.0 are probably more appropriately labeled as Recognition Societies (a definition that has been generally accepted since 1925).
- Undergraduate (General)—Rank in the upper 20% of the class.
- These criteria are minimum ones; many societies have higher standards.

### Governance

- Membership participation in setting authority for control of the affairs of the organization.
- Governance by officers/board members elected by the membership.
- Membership participation in approving and amending bylaws.
- Full financial disclosure.
- Recognition as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

### Campus Chapters

- Formal chartering of each campus chapter by institution and college/department petition, approved by official action of the governing body of the national organization.
- Candidate selection by the campus chapter.
- Membership invitation by an official chapter.
- Chapter representation in national governance.

**Web Site**—These should be accessible to the general public (missing items raise credibility questions):

- National Officers and Headquarters Staff
- National Office mailing, telephone, and e-mail addresses
- Criteria for membership
- Benefits of membership
- Membership fee
- Bylaws
- Chapter charter policies and procedures

### Factors That Raise Questions About Credibility

- Address limited to a post office box/number.
- Web site items (above) missing, especially bylaws—thus transparency is lacking
- Chief Executive Officer contact information missing
- Online member applications; certified honor societies issue invitations to qualified candidates from institutional chapters
- Vague and flexible eligibility standards
- No institutional chapter structure
- Lack of non-profit status (Not sure if it's a non-profit? See <https://www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx>.)

