



ACHS Checklist for Students, Parents, & School Administrators to Evaluate Non-Certified Honor Societies

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 invitations to membership, students (and their parents) need to weigh the value of the opportunity carefully. The following checklist will help you make that decision.

This checklist and additional information found at <http://www.achshonor.org>.

Top Indicators

that Raise Questions about Credibility

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

Proceed carefully if any of the following are true:

- The organization's contact address is limited to a Post Office Box.
- Chief Executive Officer contact information, bylaws, other key items are missing from website (see item 1 below).
- The organization is **not** recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization by the Internal Revenue Service or is a subordinate of another 501(c)(3) organization.
- The eligibility standards for membership are vague, low, or flexible (see item 2 below).
- Members have no say in how the organization is run (see table 3 below).
- An online membership application is available to the public, without a chapter-provided link. Certified honor societies **ONLY** issue invitations via chapters based at accredited institutions of higher education (see item 4 below). The chapters (never the National office) both invite and approve qualified candidates.
- There is no institutional (campus-based) chapter structure (see item 4 below).

A Closer Look at the Details

1. Web Site Guidelines

The following information should be accessible to the public through the organization's web site. Missing items indicate a lack of transparency and raise serious questions about a group's credibility and trustworthiness.

A legitimate honor society's website will always provide:

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

2. Minimum Scholastic Criteria

Membership in genuine collegiate honor society will require high standards of academic achievement. A low bar for membership (below 3.0 GPA, or below the top 20% of the class in general scholarship) can be 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 to maximize revenue. In evaluating such an invitation, it is wise to consider whether it is truly an “honor” to belong to a group that will accept any and everyone who is willing to pay the membership fees. The *minimum* standards you should look for in a society’s criteria for membership are:

Type of Honor Society	Minimum academic level required for membership	
Specialized field(s) or leadership	Rank in <i>at least</i> the upper 35% of the class. Per the ACHS Bylaws, if class rank is not available, a GPA of no lower than a 3.3 may be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generalized: all academic fields	Rank in <i>at least</i> the upper 20% of the class. Per the ACHS Bylaws, if class rank is not available, a GPA of no lower than a 3.5 may be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. 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.

A legitimate group’s members participate in:

- Setting authority for control of the affairs of the organization, and
- Approving and amending the organization’s bylaws.

To be certified, an organization must be governed so that:

- Officers/board members are elected by the membership,
- There is full financial disclosure and transparency, and
- The organization is recognized as a non-profit, e.g., it is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

4. 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, and
- 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