

Bylaws of the Association of College Honor Societies

Article I – Name and Members

The name of this organization is the Association of College Honor Societies. It is abbreviated as ACHS. The members of ACHS are certified member societies.

Article II – Mission

The mission of the Association of College Honor Societies is to build a visibly cohesive community of national and international honor societies that promotes the values of higher education; fosters excellence in scholarship, leadership, service, and research; and adheres to the standards of honor society excellence.

Article III - Purpose

- A. The purpose of ACHS is to:
 - 1. set and maintain minimum standards for certified member societies;
 - 2. advocate for the value and significance of certified member societies throughout higher education;
 - 3. facilitate collaboration among certified member societies;
 - 4. regularly review each certified member society to assure it meets the standards for certified member societies;
 - 5. provide education for the staff leadership of certified member societies; and
 - 6. increase the number of certified member societies.

- B. ACHS is a charitable organization under United States Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) and is organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes as set forth in United States Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). None of its earnings may inure to a private shareholder or person.

Article IV – Characteristics of Certified Member Societies

- A. A certified member society is an honor society that offers membership to undergraduate or graduate students enrolled in an institution [See Article XVIII definition of institution] who, as defined by the society, have achieved academic excellence across all their coursework or in a particular field, program or major; and who may also have achieved excellence in leadership, research, service or a collegiate activity or program.

- B. There are two classifications of certified member societies: general and specialized.

- C. A certified member society in the general classification is one that receives into membership students:
 - 1. who are in any major or field of study or in an overarching discipline that may be subdivided into distinct fields; and
 - 2. who have attained the scholastic and other requirements that the certified member society has established.

- D. A certified member society in the general classification that bases eligibility:
1. primarily on scholarship, may receive into membership students who rank no lower than the highest 20 percent of their class, [See Article XVIII definitions of class and rank] or, if class rank is unavailable, a cumulative grade point of at least 3.5; and
 2. additionally on leadership, may receive into membership students who rank no lower than the highest 35 percent of their class or, if class rank is unavailable, a cumulative grade point of at least 3.3.
- E. A certified member society in the general classification must fall into one of these categories: general lower, general upper, or general graduate.
1. A certified member society in the general lower category may receive into membership students:
 - a. who are enrolled in their first or second year and have completed or exceeded the number of undergraduate credits [See Article XVIII definition of credit] that constitute a full-time undergraduate academic load [See Article XVIII definition of full-time undergraduate academic load] or
 - b. who have completed fewer than 50 percent of the credits required for an undergraduate degree.
 2. A certified member society in the general upper category may receive into membership students who have completed at least 50 percent of the credits required for an undergraduate degree.
 3. A certified member society in the general graduate category may receive into membership graduate students who have been unconditionally admitted to a degree-granting program and have completed or exceeded the number of graduate credits that constitute a full-time graduate academic load that an institution uses to define full-time status in one term and maintains a grade point average that, if continued, will make them eligible for a graduate degree. [See Article XVIII definition of full-time graduate academic load.]
- F. A certified member society in the specialized classification is one that receives into membership students:
1. who are in a particular major or field of study; and
 2. who have attained the scholastic and other requirements that the certified member society has established.
- G. A certified member society in the specialized classification may receive into membership students who rank no lower than the highest 35 percent of their class or, if class rank is unavailable, a cumulative grade point of at least 3.3.
- H. A certified member society in the specialized classification must fall into one of these categories: specialized lower, specialized upper, or specialized graduate.
1. A certified member society in the specialized lower category may receive into membership students who have completed no fewer than the number of credits that constitute a full-time undergraduate academic load and, if applicable, fewer than 37.5 percent of the credits required for a baccalaureate degree.

2. A certified member society in the specialized upper category may receive into membership students who have completed at least 37.5 percent of the credits required for a baccalaureate degree.
 3. A certified member society in the specialized graduate category may receive into membership graduate students who have been unconditionally admitted to a degree-granting program and have completed or exceeded the number of graduate credits that constitute a full-time graduate academic load that an institution uses to define full-time status in one term and maintains a grade point average that, if continued, will make them eligible for a graduate degree. [See Article XVIII definition of full-time graduate academic load.]
- I. A certified member society in the general upper or specialized upper category may receive into membership graduate students as long as they meet the society's minimum requirements for graduate students.
 - J. A certified member society or a petitioning honor society may request to use a lower grade point than specified in these Bylaws when class rank is unavailable for some or all of its chapters. A request approved by the Board shall permit the society to use the requested grade point and be deemed not in violation of the provisions of these Bylaws provided the society reports the grade point used annually. A society that fails to report its use of grade point or wishes to change the grade point used must submit a new request. Such a request must:
 1. meet the requirements and procedure set by the Board;
 2. provide justification for the use of grade point when class rank is unavailable; and
 3. be approved by a two-thirds vote of the Board.

Article V – Requirements for Membership in ACHS

To become and remain a certified member society, an honor society must:

- A. be determined to be an exempt organization as set forth in United States Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c), be a charitable organization that is organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes, and allow none of its earnings to inure to a private shareholder or person; and
- B. in its overarching governing document:
 1. circumscribe the set of students who may be members according to Article IV;
 2. establish that it offers membership primarily to those who have:
 - a. enrolled in an accredited institution and
 - b. completed at least one term's [See Article XVIII definition of term] worth of institutional credits or of transfer or advanced placement credits;
 3. set forth and maintain criteria for membership that are observed by all collegiate chapters;
 4. establish if it, on a limited basis, offers full or honorific membership to eminent, distinguished, or otherwise worthy individuals who exemplify the ideals and the purposes of the certified member society and are not presently eligible as collegiate members;
 5. set forth selection methods that are observed by all collegiate chapters;

6. state that invitation to collegiate membership may be issued only by a collegiate chapter duly chartered by the certified member society;
7. establish that membership may be conferred on the basis of eligibility alone, without regard for membership in or affiliation with other organizations;
8. establish that no social pressure to accept membership may be exerted by it, its members, advisors, alumni, or by a chapter;
9. establish that it is governed democratically by collegiate members or chapters who:
 - a. have the right to elect the members of the overarching governing board, either in an individual or representative capacity; and
 - b. have the power to adopt, amend, or repeal any part of the organization's overarching governing document;
10. establish that it conducts elections of its governing board at least once every four years; and
11. establish that neither it nor any of its chapters may discriminate on the basis of any class protected by federal law.

Article VI – Obligations of a Certified Member Society

- A. A certified member society must:
 1. continuously meet the Requirements for Membership in ACHS as defined in Article V;
 2. support the Mission of ACHS;
 3. cooperate in promoting the value of certified honor societies through its chapters and to the administrators of campuses where their chapters are located;
 4. report to the ACHS executive director about significant changes in management, personnel, or governing policies;
 5. file timely and accurate reports annually;
 6. pay all dues and fees on time; and
 7. comply with periodic standards reviews.
- B. The statutes for nonprofit corporations in the state where ACHS is incorporated apply to matters concerning the suspension and expulsion of a certified member society. A certified member society may be suspended or expelled from membership by:
 1. a vote of two thirds of the directors for failure to meet obligations 4, 5, 6, or 7 listed above; or
 2. a four-fifths vote of certified member societies for failure to meet any obligation listed above.

Article VII – Rights of Certified Member Society

- A. So long as it continues to meet the Requirements for Membership in ACHS as defined in Article V, a certified member society may, through its voting representative:
 1. hold one seat on the Council and participate in debate;
 2. vote on any matter considered by the Council;
 3. be considered for election to the Board of Directors;
 4. participate in committee work or designate staff or volunteers to participate in committee work; and

5. enjoy continuous membership from year to year.
- B. The voting representative and other staff or volunteers of a certified member society may participate in educational programming offered by ACHS, provided that the fees for the programming have been paid.
- C. A certified member society may resign from membership and shall indicate this action by submitting a written resignation to the executive director.

Article VIII – Types of Chapters

- A. A certified member society:
 1. may only charter or reactivate collegiate chapters at or with accredited institutions of higher education [see Article XVIII definition of accredited institutions of higher education] that grant the associate, baccalaureate, masters, or doctoral degree so long as the appropriate authority of the institution has approved the chartering; and
 2. shall maintain its collegiate chapters continuously so long as the institution holding the charter remains accredited and its authority continues to approve the chapter's existence and the chapter meets the requirements of the society's overarching governing document.
- B. A certified member society may claim that it has a collegiate chapter at an institution only if:
 1. the institution holds a charter of the certified member society; and
 2. the chapter at the institution remains active.
- C. A certified member society that allows for collegiate chapters at an institution outside of the United States must set policies for determining that the institution is accredited or otherwise is a legitimate institution.
- D. A certified member society may have alumni chapters established by location, region, connection to a particular institution, or other grouping particular to it.

Article IX – Election to Membership in ACHS

- A. An honor society may be considered for election to membership in ACHS as a certified member society if it:
 1. meets all the requirements of membership (see Article V);
 2. has been established as an honor society for at least five years; and
 3. has at least ten active collegiate chapters.
- B. A four-fifths affirmative vote of the Council voting is required for the election of an honor society to membership.
- C. An honor society that resigned or was suspended from membership may be reinstated after petitioning through the regular process.

Article X – Council

- A. The Council governs ACHS through these Bylaws and is made up of one voting representative from each certified member society.
- B. The Council shall:
 - 1. meet at least once per year at an Annual Business Meeting and be held at a time and in a format determined by the Board;
 - 2. conduct the Annual Business Meeting separately or as part of an Annual Conference;
 - 3. adopt the annual budget as recommended by the Board after a review period of at least two weeks:
 - a. if no member society requests a meeting by the deadline, the budget will be considered adopted by the Council; or
 - b. if a member society requests a meeting to discuss the budget, the Board will schedule the virtual meeting for discussion and a vote to adopt the budget with a majority of those participating necessary for adoption;
 - 4. annually elect directors and members of the Nominations Committee based on the slate for each that has been presented by the Nominations Committee; and
 - 5. vote on all proposals of membership.
- C. The Council may meet in person, telephonically or through real-time web meeting as is practicable for the circumstances. The official call to the Annual Business Meeting shall be sent to each certified member society at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.
- D. A question may be voted upon by the Council outside of a meeting using an electronic voting method so long as at least 15 days' notice of the vote and length of time to cast a ballot has been given.
- E. A quorum for conducting Council business is a majority of voting representatives.
- F. A special meeting of the Council may be called by the president upon the written request of three fourths of the members of the Board or two thirds of certified member societies. The special meeting must be held no later than 30 and no sooner than five days after the request.

Article XI – Board of Directors

- A. The Board of Directors (Board) is made up of seven directors slated during the Annual Business Meeting from among the voting representatives of the Council. The make-up of the Board is:
 - 1. two directors representing certified member societies in the general classification;
 - 2. two directors representing certified member societies in the specialized classification; and
 - 3. three directors-at-large representing either of the classifications of certified member societies.
- B. The directors serve staggered three-year terms.

- C. A director may not serve more than two consecutive elected terms.
- D. The executive director is an *ex officio* member of the Board, serving with voice but not vote.
- E. The Board conducts the business of ACHS between meetings of the Council, sets policies and procedures for operations, provides fiduciary oversight, observes the operation of committees, and employs an executive director of the national office to operate ACHS.
- F. The Board shall:
 - 1. meet at least once each year;
 - 2. report at least annually to the Council;
 - 3. determine the fiscal year for ACHS;
 - 4. review and recommend the annual budget to the Council for its approval;
 - 5. review these Bylaws at least once a year;
 - 6. recommend petitioning honor societies for membership when they meet the Requirements for Membership in ACHS; and
 - 7. review and recommend exceptions to the higher education accreditation requirements when necessary.
- G. The president may call additional meetings as needed, and the president must call a meeting upon the written request of a majority of the directors.
- H. A majority of the directors must be present to conduct business at a meeting of the Board.
- I. The Board may meet in person, telephonically or through real-time web meeting as is practicable for the circumstances. The Board may vote on any question, when practicable, by electronic means, and if a majority of the Board has cast a ballot, a plurality of ballots in the affirmative carries the question.
- J. A director may resign in a written notice to the executive director or president.
- K. The statutes for nonprofit corporations in the state where ACHS is incorporated apply to matters concerning the removal of a director except that:
 - 1. the Board may remove a director for failing to attend three Board meetings in a row so long as the director has been provided notice that a vote to remove is imminent and if a majority of the directors vote in favor of removal; and
 - 2. the Council may remove a director for cause so long as all certified member societies have been provided with notice at least ten business days before the vote and if a majority of certified member societies vote for removal.
- L. Should a director position become vacant, the Board shall appoint a replacement from among the representatives of certified member societies to serve until the next Annual Business Meeting of the Council. A representative who had been removed or who resigned from the Board is ineligible to be appointed as a replacement.

Article XII – Officers

- A. The officers of ACHS are the president, vice president, and secretary and are elected by the directors from among their own number to serve a term of one year or until their successors are elected.
- B. No officer may serve more than two consecutive terms in the same office.
- C. The officers shall perform the duties set forth by the Bylaws and the Board to provide for the effective operation of ACHS. They may meet separately from the Board to further the business of ACHS in between Board meetings.
- D. The president provides leadership in the effective operation of ACHS and:
 - 1. presides at all meetings of the Council, Board, and the officers;
 - 2. appoints the members and chair of each Standing Committee except the Nominations Committee;
 - 3. appoints the members and chair of each ad hoc committee that has been established by the Board;
 - 4. may be *ex officio* a member of any committee except the Nominations Committee; and
 - 5. meets regularly with the executive director.
- E. ACHS shall give the honorific title of president emeritus or emerita to a person who has completed at least one full term as president.
- F. The vice president contributes to the effective operation of ACHS and:
 - 1. serves on the program committee;
 - 2. performs the duties of president during the president's temporary absence; and
 - 3. succeeds to the office of president for the remainder of the term if the president has become permanently absent.
- G. The secretary contributes to the effective operation of ACHS and:
 - 1. takes the Minutes of all Board and Council meetings;
 - 2. contributes as needed to the drafting of both internal and external correspondence; and
 - 3. monitors the effective operations of all committees in coordination with the officers.
- H. An officer may resign in a written notice to the president or executive director, indicating if the resignation also includes their director position.
- I. The Board may remove an officer for cause so long as the officer has been provided notice of the vote for removal and if a majority of the directors vote for removal. A removal from office does not necessarily constitute a removal from the position of director.

Article XIII – Committees

- A. The Standing Committees of ACHS are:
 - 1. Nominations
 - 2. Eligibility and Admissions
 - 3. Standards and Definitions

- B. The Nominations Committee consists of five members of the Council. The Council elects two in even years and three in odd years for terms of two years each. Efforts should be made to ensure that the committee's make-up represents the different categories of certified honor societies.
 - 1. The committee annually nominates a separate slate of candidates for the Board and Nominations Committee members as needed to fill all vacancies and ensure a full number of directors and committee members are in place.
 - 2. The chair of the committee is elected annually by the committee from among its members.
 - 3. A director may not serve on the Nominations Committee.
 - 4. Should a position become vacant on the Nominations Committee, the Board shall appoint a replacement from among the representatives of certified member societies to serve the remainder of that term.

- C. The Eligibility and Admissions Committee explores and corresponds with nonmember honor societies to determine their interest in membership in ACHS and reviews petitions for admission to ACHS to determine a petitioner's eligibility. The committee recommends new honor societies to the Board and ensures that the Council has adequate information about a petitioner before a vote on admission is requested.

- D. The Standards and Definitions Committee studies issues related to standards and definitions of honor societies and consults with the executive director about the compliance of certified member societies. The committee reports to the Board and recommends actions after scheduled reviews of certified member societies have been conducted.

- E. The Board may establish *ad hoc* committees to further the operations of ACHS. The charge to an *ad hoc* committee and an *ad hoc* committee itself should not interfere with the operation of a Standing Committee.

Article XIV – Executive Director

- A. The executive director is hired by and reports to the Board.

- B. The duties of the executive director include:
 - 1. running the day-to-day operations of ACHS;
 - 2. communicating with external entities on behalf of ACHS;
 - 3. managing the operations of the National Office including the timely filing of taxes and reports;
 - 4. coordinating meetings and conferences;

5. providing support to the Board and committees;
6. securing and maintaining the proper insurance and bonding;
7. overseeing finances and ensuring timely disbursements;
8. maintaining all records; and
9. executing all other duties as assigned by the Board.

Article XV – Indemnification

ACHS shall indemnify an officer, director, employee, committee member, or agent who is acting at the request of ACHS unless the person has breached or failed to perform the duties of the office or assignment either through recklessness, lack of care, self-dealing, or purposeful disregard for the best interests of ACHS.

Article XVI – Dissolution

- A. The Council may decide to dissolve ACHS upon a three-fourths affirmative vote of the entire membership of the Council.
- B. Upon dissolution, ACHS shall pay its liabilities to the extent possible and dispose of its assets to an organization or organizations that are operating as an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and whose mission or purpose closely aligns with the Mission of ACHS.
- C. In no case may the assets disposed inure to any certified member society, former member society, or any person whether or not connected with ACHS, beyond normal reimbursement for valid expenses or services rendered or payment of compensation to an ACHS employee.

Article XVII – Parliamentary Authority

The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* govern ACHS in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these Bylaws and any special rules of order ACHS may adopt.

Article XVIII – Definitions of Terms

A. accredited institutions of higher education

: those that meet the academic quality, improvement and accountability expectations established by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or by the institutional and programmatic accreditors recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Discussion: In the stewardship of ACHS's purpose and when necessary to make recommendations for the addition of new honor societies or the retention of a current member society, the BOD should review the information listed in the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs to determine the existence of legitimate institutions or programs of higher learning that should be included in ACHS.

B. class

: in the context of progress toward an academic degree, a body of students that enter an institution or a program at the same time or that, by the satisfactory completion of required credits, are at nearly equal lengths of time from similar degrees

Discussion: Historically American higher education described cohorts of undergraduate students as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors, descriptors that are being dropped by many institutions in favor of less binary terminology like first-year, second-year, third-year, fourth-year, and so on. Class is distinguished from residence [see Article XVIII definition of residence] in these Bylaws.

C. credit

: the basic unit used by an institution to represent a student's completion of a degree requirement

Discussion: Across the variety of institutions at which certified member societies have or may have chapters, there is, likewise, variety in the terminology used (credit hour, hour, semester hour, or credit point to name a few). The variety is standardized in these Bylaws,

If these Bylaws are unclear about a student's status at an institution, the institution's definition applies.

D. full-time undergraduate academic load/full-time graduate academic load

: the quantity (measure, number, amount) of undergraduate or graduate credits that an institution uses to define full-time status in one term

Discussion: ACHS member societies have long used full-time status as a threshold of credit eligibility for newer students to join lower category honor societies as undergraduates or graduate category honor societies as graduate students. Some societies may require that this number be reached within a single term while others allow for the threshold to be reached over several terms. That is up to the society. For the purpose of these Bylaws, this number is defined by the institution, whether it is twelve, nine or some other number of academic credits.

E. Institution/institutional

: an organization of higher learning that grants academic degrees

Discussion: The authority granting the charter of an organization of higher learning uses terminology to suit its purpose, such as university, college, school, or institute, to name a few. A standardized term in its simplest form is used in these Bylaws to describe an institution that is a singular entity or is one branch or campus of a larger system.

F. rank

: a student's scholastic record as compared to other students

Discussion: Historically, rank, whether cumulative or specific to a major, has been determined by the institution.

G. residence

: as distinguished from *class*, the period of time that a student is enrolled in an institution

Discussion: Some certified member societies accept into membership students who have been enrolled for a particular period of time, like the first year, regardless of the number of credits they bring with them through advanced placement or transfer.

H. term

: the division in an academic year during which instruction is given to students

Discussion: Semester, quarter, and trimester are examples of a variety of terminology, which is standardized in these Bylaws.

Article XIX – Amendments

- A. These Bylaws may be amended by the Council by a two-thirds affirmative vote as long as the Council has been notified at least 30 calendar days before the electronic voting on the amendment closes.
- B. At a meeting of the Council, even if the 30-calendar-day notice has not been met, the Council may amend these Bylaws by a three-fourths affirmative vote conducted using either an audible roll call or electronic voting.

Legislative History

These Bylaws as amended were approved by Council on January 31, 2025. They replace any previous version of the Bylaws.