



The Organization and Purpose of the Association of College Honor Societies

The Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) is a visibly cohesive community of national and international honor societies, individually and collaboratively exhibiting excellence in scholarship, service, programs, and governance. A coordinating agency for these societies in chartering chapters in accredited colleges and universities, the Association sets high priority on maintaining high standards, on defining the honor society movement, and on developing criteria for judging the credibility and legitimacy of honor societies.

History

During the first 25 years of the twentieth century, higher education witnessed a sporadic evolution of honor societies resulting in proliferation, duplication, and low standards. In October 1925, six credible honor societies, seeing the urgent need to define and enhance the honor society movement, organized the Association of College Honor Societies. Other legitimate societies soon affiliated to begin an expanding membership that currently includes more than 65 societies.

More than 75 years of dedication to excellence have produced a highly respected professional organization that gives continuous attention to developing high standards and a process of assuring that members are in compliance with the Association's bylaws. The Association of College Honor Societies is the nation's only certifying agency for college and university honor societies.

Membership

Association members are academic honor societies as opposed to college professional and social fraternities. Honor societies recognize superior scholarship and/or leadership achievement either in broad academic disciplines or in departmental fields, including undergraduate and/or graduate levels. According to ACHS bylaws, character and specified eligibility are the sole criteria for membership in an honor society. Membership recruitment is by invitation only, and is conducted by campus chapters—without applying social pressures—(such as solicitation or "rushing" to enlist initiates). Likewise, Association societies must function without preferences to gender, race, and religion.

By certifying the quality of member societies, the Association affirms that elections to honor society membership should represent superior academic achievement. Standards set by the Association require membership participation in society governance in electing officers and board members, setting authority in organizational affairs, and keeping bylaws current. To designate criteria for membership eligibility, the association has classified distinctive groups and set standards for each one as to scholarship and leadership. For general honor societies, scholarship recognition represents the highest 20 percent of the college class no earlier than the fourth semester or seventh quarter. For honoring leadership, these societies must choose from the highest 35 percent, while specialized societies, representing particular fields, induct students who rank in the highest 35 percent of the college class and have completed three semesters or five quarters. All of these societies may elect superior graduate students.

Program

To provide a list of certified societies, the Association publishes an *ACHS Handbook* with the Association's bylaws, society profiles, and general information. Annual meetings offer opportunities to review standards, discuss issues of concern in higher education and the honors community, and to share best practices in society governance, operations, and campus activities. Information is available to all members in minutes, special studies, committee reports, and the ACHS web site.

Recognition of the Association at the national level is evident in the increasing collaboration with university administrators, faculty, educational associations, and other groups.

Significant attention is seen in the use of the Association's classification of honor societies in *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*, in the *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education*, and in action by the U.S. Civil Service Commission on April 13, 1973—designating membership in an ACHS-qualified honor society as meeting one requirement for entrance at the GS-7 level.

Organization

Meeting annually, a Council of affiliate societies governs the Association with one vote per society to be cast by each society's official representative. Between meetings, the Board of Directors conducts all business of the Association and administers the policies, programs, and activities formulated by the Council. The seven members comprising the Board of Directors are President, Vice President, Secretary, Immediate Past President, and three Members-at-Large, who are elected from the Council and represent general and specialized honor societies.

An annual dues structure for member societies is the chief source of revenue, while other limited income may derive from vendor participation, annual meetings, and occasional grants.