



It's An Honor: How to Make the Smart Decision to Join a College Honor Society

It is that time of year when college students start opening their mailboxes and email to find invitations to join a variety of college honor societies. I believe an honor society is something that every college student should aspire to be invited to join. An honor society recognizes you for your ability to be academically successful and provides you with an opportunity to be engaged with a group of likeminded high achievers. Most honor societies provide scholarships, career and networking resources, community service, activities on campus and experiences that will add value to your overall college education.

I recently had lunch with the president of the University of Virginia chapter of The National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS) and I asked her "what's the most challenging thing for her at UVA regarding honor societies?" She quickly answered "knowing which honor societies are valuable, worthwhile and legitimate."

She is not alone. Many students, and parents, struggle with the onslaught of invitations and are confused about how best to determine legitimacy and/or knowing which group could actually be beneficial to the student and their future. If you are academically successful, you will most likely be invited to join several honor societies during your college career. You can certainly join every honor society you are invited into or you can look at each one individually to determine the one that will provide you the most meaningful benefits.

Here are ten key tips to help you determine which honor society is the right one for you. It should also help you quickly discern if a group is a scam or a group that is falsely presenting itself as an honor society.

1. The Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) is the national organization that certifies honor societies which are meeting the highest standards. Check the list of ACHS members to confirm the honor society you are considering is not a scam:
http://www.achsnatl.org/quick_link.asp
2. If the honor society you are considering is not a member of ACHS, you may want to call the honor society directly and ask why they are not a member.
3. Actually, another way to discern legitimacy of the honor society is to give them a call. Does the website provide a phone number that can be answered by a person? Be concerned if you only get a voicemail option when you call. Also, is there an actual address listed on the website and not a PO Box.

4. Also make sure the website has a fully accessible list of national officers and headquarters staff, criteria and benefits of membership, membership fee, bylaws, and chapter charter policy.
5. Speaking of membership fee, **every** college honor society has a membership fee. This is different than your experience may have been with the National Honor Society (NHS) in high school. The fee typically covers the expenses related to the benefits you receive as a member. You may also find that many honor societies have a one-time lifetime membership fee. My experience and belief is that the decision to join is making an investment in your future.
6. Never join an organization that only provides an online application to join. You may be able to join a legitimate honor society online but you should have received something from the organization stating that the campus you attend has stated you are qualified to join. Vague or flexible membership criteria is not acceptable for a legitimate honor society.
7. Make sure there is an actual recognized real chapter on your campus. Do not join an honor society that does not provide a way for you to interact and meet other members on your campus. Some scam groups will list a member name and the school they attend to make it appear as though there is an actual chapter but if you look closely that group won't have the ability to get people together, as a chapter, on campus. You may join an honor society with no intentions of being very involved or attending a chapter meeting – but any legitimate honor society will have a local chapter and a way for you to interact if you choose to do so.
8. You should confirm the honor society is a non-profit organization. Many scam honor societies are emerging that are portraying themselves as a non-profit, for example they may use a .org domain name for their website, but they are a for profit company. Make sure the organization you are considering joining has an annual report on their website and will provide you with financial information if you ask. Transparency is key and groups that are not sharing are probably not a group that you should join.
9. The Association of College Honor Societies provides a great list of “how to judge the credibility of an honor society” : http://www.achsnatl.org/standards_alert.asp
10. Finally, just because you, your parents, your RA, your professor or anyone you may ask has not heard of the honor society you have been invited to join that doesn't automatically/immediately mean it is a scam or not a legitimate honor society. Phi Beta Kappa is the oldest honor society and there are people who have not heard of it. However, if you take a few minutes to do your research, you will quickly determine the honor societies that exist to add value and good recognition to your college experience....and those that you may want to avoid.

Congratulations if you have been invited to join a college honor society! I like to remind students that the majority of their college peers don't get invited to join any college honor society. It truly is an honor. Don't miss out on the possibilities and good luck making the smart decision to join.

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