

2020–21 Honor Society

Adviser Flex *Guide:*

Addressing Challenges Presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic and Virtual Learning in Managing an Honor Society Chapter

The current pandemic and delay in returning to in-person instruction presents continuing challenges to Honor Society chapters and to advisers carrying out chapter management duties. Students—both prospective members and current members—may also face challenges in meeting eligibility requirements as well as maintaining and fulfilling membership obligations.

The national office has prepared the following guidance to assist chapter advisers in navigating this uncharted territory. Chapters should continue to emphasize student and staff safety in the performance of all chapter management activities, including induction ceremonies, service projects, and disciplinary hearings.

What Policies must Chapters Continue to Adhere to During this Time?

Chapter bylaws and procedures must continue to comply with the national policies found in the national constitutions and handbooks. These policies include:

- The scholarship criteria remains based on a cumulative **GPA**, rather than individual course grades, individual semester/trimester/grading period performance, or on subjective measures, such as the quality of the candidate form, completion of individual assignments, etc.
- A five-member faculty council is responsible for all selection and dismissal decisions. A majority vote of the council is required for selection and dismissal. Advisers and principals may not vote or otherwise render selection or dismissal decisions during the evaluation of candidates or members. Principals have the authority to hear appeals for nonselection and dismissal decisions.
- Chapters have an obligation to ensure that members receive due process. All members are entitled to due process as a right of their membership. **Automatic/immediate dismissals remain prohibited.** A written warning and period of improvement are required in all cases in which a member is deficient in maintaining membership obligations, with the exception of flagrant violations of school rules or the law. Dismissal hearings may be held virtually but are still required prior to any dismissal vote. A majority vote of the five-member council is required to dismiss a member **after** the hearing.
- As part of due process, all members have a right to appeal dismissal decisions to their school principal.



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Membership Eligibility

For many schools, the second semester/third trimester/fourth quarter was interrupted when schools moved to remote learning and their districts directed schools not to assign grades for the latter part of the year. This leaves those students with the cumulative GPA they had at the end of first semester/second trimester/fourth quarter.

How do you assess scholarship this year if you are planning a fall selection process and induction? There are several options available to chapters.

Chapters can:

1. Base scholastic eligibility on the most recently available cumulative GPA (i.e., end of first semester of the recently completed academic year).
2. Temporarily lower the required cumulative GPA in recognition of the increased difficulty students are facing. This will require the approval of the faculty council, principal, and an amendment in the chapter bylaws. The cumulative GPA cannot be lower than the national minimum.

If circumstances arise that make it untenable to administer selection processes with flexible guidelines, then the chapter may opt to postpone the fall selection and induction to just after the mid-year/holiday break. This will grant students the opportunity to improve their cumulative GPA and use that new average calculated after fall semester.

Selection

In addition to adapting eligibility requirements, schools operating on distance learning and limited or modified in-person instructional models should utilize electronic forms and a virtual faculty council meeting during evaluations for this year's selection process.

1. Faculty councils may take the impact of the pandemic, social distancing, and lack of school-based activities into consideration when evaluating service and leadership (and citizenship for NJHS). Prioritize activities completed prior to March 2020 and consider adding an essay or open-ended questions to your candidate packet that address the pillars of service, leadership, and character (including citizenship).

Sample essay prompt for NHS: Describe how you have demonstrated the remaining three pillars of NHS—service, leadership, and character—during your high school career.

Sample essay prompt for NJHS: Describe how you have demonstrated the remaining four pillars of NJHS—service, leadership, character, and citizenship—as a member of NJHS. How will you continue to demonstrate these pillars as a member of NJHS?

*As a reminder, essays are used to help the council evaluate the remaining criteria, and should not be a return to evaluating the scholarship criteria. Candidates have already met this criteria.

2. Develop a candidate form using Google, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, or another digital platform approved by your school. Post the form in a dedicated section on the school website or email it to candidates directly. Students can complete their forms and email them back to the adviser by the established deadline. If emailing the form, require a reply to ensure the student received it.



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Induction

In lieu of in-person induction ceremonies, chapters may hold virtual ceremonies. In spring 2020, we offered several digital resources to assist chapters with conducting a virtual induction ceremony. Please visit the Adviser Resource Center on the [NHS](#) and [NJHS](#) websites for the following virtual induction templates:

- Induction Ceremony PowerPoint Template
- Sample Induction Ceremony Presentation
- Induction Ceremony Graphics

Service: Individual Service and Group Service Activities

Chapters have flexibility with regard to individual service and group service activities. They can:

- Extend the deadline.
- Reduce the number of hours/activities required for this year.

We offer some virtual resources to help chapters adapt their service requirements to accommodate social distancing and other limitations:

- This year, the National Honor Societies are partnering with DoSomething.org to promote online voter registration drives, which can serve as a great virtual service project. More information can be found online for each program:
 - [NHS](#)
 - [NJHS](#)
- In addition, DoSomething.org is piloting a [Volunteer Credit Program](#), from which students can receive a digital certificate verifying their time spent on a particular service project once completed.
- The National Honor Societies also recommend the following resources:
 - <http://leadasap.ysa.org/gysd/#ideas>
 - www.pointsoflight.org/virtual-volunteering-opportunities
 - www.goodmorningamerica.com/living/story/virtual-volunteering-ways-volunteer-home-time-coronavirus-69741410

In addition to these resources, chapters can consider hosting the following virtual group service activities:

- Tutoring
- Letter (email) writing campaigns to nursing homes, first responders, or elementary students
- Video messages of hope or support

Consider allowing members to present new solutions for providing service, and use this opportunity to redefine what constitutes true service in their community. This can serve as a topic for the first chapter meeting of the year.

We encourage chapters to change the mindset about service in our schools, and consider the points made in our [Everyday Pillars](#) statement.



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Service: Individual Service and Group Service Activities, Continued

Finally, if there are students in the chapter who cannot access and perform service opportunities in a safe and meaningful way, a chapter is permitted to waive/freeze service hours and requirements as long as they apply to all student members. Advisers should consult with the faculty council and draft your own local written guidance to address these unique situations.

Disciplinary Matters: Warning and Dismissal

With the exception of serious violations of school rules or public laws, the national office recommends that chapters use discipline (warnings) and dismissals sparingly during this academic year. While maintaining standards and meeting membership obligations remain an essential part of their Honor Society duties, we also empathize with advisers and students who are dealing with very unique and challenging circumstances.

All members remain entitled to due process, which requires a warning period (with the exception of violations of school rules or public laws), and a due process hearing prior to dismissal.

If warnings or due process hearing letters are issued via email, be sure to include a read receipt and request a written confirmation of receipt.

Meetings

Chapter meetings may be held virtually, while recognizing that some students may have limited access to their home computers or internet. In those or similar cases:

1. Accommodations can be made for those students, such as allowing them to check in with an adviser or a chapter officer. Doing so would count toward their meeting attendance.
2. Record meetings and post them for members to view, and confirm viewing with the adviser.
3. Consider using a message board or **GroupMe** type of communication to allow students to check in instead of attending live meetings. Count check-ins towards meeting attendance requirements.

Dues

If your chapter will be collecting dues this year, consider how those will be collected if there is no in-person instruction this year. If your chapter expenses have decreased and/or some families are facing financial hardships, you can:

- Waive or reduce dues, and/or forego any action for nonpayment.
- Provide optional dues-support opportunities to parents to help support the chapter.
- Reach out to parents who may be interested in contributing beyond the usual required amount, in order to help other students/families who may be experiencing hardships due to coronavirus or family situation. These additional funds could be used to cover the cost of T-shirts or other recognition items.



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Closing Thoughts

Clearly communicate all changes with parents and students in writing via email, by posting on your school website, or other means in which all students and parents will receive the information. Be sure to keep your administration up to date with all changes related to your chapter. With any changes to your selection process or service requirements, be sure to document them in your local school bylaws and communicate all changes to members in writing.

The national office would like to extend a message of thanks for all that you do for your students, whether they are members of NHS and/or NJHS or not. We understand that this year will likely bring some challenges, but we are confident that we can navigate them together.

Contact Us:

Our Customer Care Center is available to assist you with any concerns that arise this year.

NHS email: nhs@nhs.us

NJHS email: njhs@njhs.us



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