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Honor Societies' Constitution and Bylaws: The Track to ACHS Accreditation

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An Honors College Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Business  
James Madison University

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by Jenna Rose Jansen

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Accepted by the faculty of the College of Business, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Research Methods	6
Results	7
Impacts	9
Appendix A: Constitution of Delta Mu Sigma	11
Appendix B: Coding Sheet for Content Analysis	15
Appendix C: Content Analysis Raw Data	16
Works Cited	17

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## **Abstract**

The number of predatory honor societies continues to rise, with organizations asking students to pay a membership fee while offering virtually no benefit. The Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS), an accreditation body, combats this by evaluating societies on numerous criteria. This project aimed to investigate the structure of accredited honor societies to see their similarities. Areas where accredited societies differed from ACHS guidelines were also discovered. This research was conducted using content analysis of a sample of accredited honor societies. This project aims to show how honor societies can structure themselves to be on track for ACHS accreditation. Additionally, using these findings, a Constitution was written for Delta Mu Sigma, a newly founded honor society, that is in keeping with ACHS guidelines.

## **Introduction**

Previous research has shown a relationship between student involvement in extracurricular activities and leadership development (Foreman & Retallick, 2012). Students who served as officers showed the greatest leadership potential. Honor societies are one type of organization that appeals to students due to opportunities for leadership, networking, and the prestige of being on a resume (Fowler, 2019).

Due to this appeal, there has been an increase in the number of predatory organizations that claim to be an honor society (Fowler, 2019). These organizations typically require students to pay a fee and offer little benefit other than a line on a resume. The Association of College Honor Societies, or the ACHS, is a certifying agency for college honor societies. The ACHS helps to set standards and guidelines for successful organizations and ensure excellence in membership. Becoming accredited by the ACHS is an essential step for the success of a college or university honor society. The ACHS has established criteria to judge the credibility of an honor society, which includes: 1) academic requirements for membership, 2) financial status of the organization, 3) membership selection guidelines, and 4) items of importance for a society's website. The ACHS also describes areas that raise a concern regarding the credibility of an honor society, including missing items on a website, a publicly available application, and vague membership requirements.

The ACHS has general credibility information and an evaluation form that provides recommended standards for an honor society in order to increase the likelihood that the society's application is accepted. While these guidelines are helpful, not every ACHS accredited honor society fulfills all of these aspects. Additionally, many of the accredited honor societies have

similar rules or standards among each other that are not required or recommended by the ACHS. This makes it more difficult to differentiate between credible and predatory honor societies. Additionally, these contrasting standards can cause confusion for honor societies that are interested in applying for ACHS accreditation.

Delta Mu Sigma, a digital marketing honor society, was founded at James Madison University in 2018. The purpose of this society is to “recognize academic excellence and commitment to growth, innovation, and integrity of digital marketing scholarship and practice.” Delta Mu Sigma has a goal of receiving ACHS accreditation after the required waiting time of 5 years from first operating as a national organization (“ACHS Membership Information,” 2020). In order to achieve this, Delta Mu Sigma must ensure its structure and documents, namely the Constitution, are set up in accordance with ACHS standards. Through this research, I will construct Delta Mu Sigma’s Constitution in a way that sets the society up for ACHS accreditation once the necessary waiting time has passed.

### **Research Methods**

A content analysis of a sample (n=30) of accredited college honor societies was conducted to discover their shared aspects. The content analysis was carried out by using a coding sheet (Appendix B) that included general information about the society, academic and behavioral membership requirements, Constitution and Bylaws inclusions, and the ACHS general credibility criteria. The data was collected on accredited societies’ official websites, as well as publicly available documents, such as the Constitution, Bylaws, and Policies and Procedures of the society. Through the content analysis, I discovered the most common components of an honor society that should be present for accreditation. Additionally, I found

the areas in which many honor societies differ from ACHS guidelines. This research shows which aspects are worth honor societies pursuing or changing in order to receive accreditation, and which are not necessary to change or include.

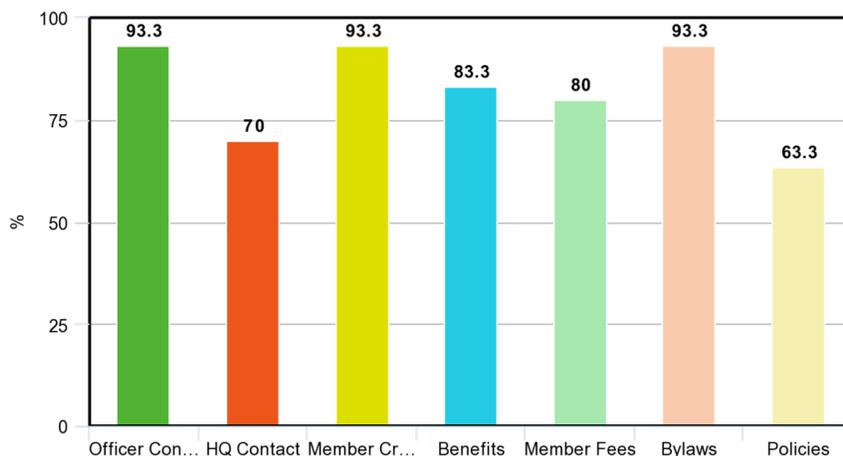
## **Results**

Through the content analysis, I found numerous areas where accredited honor societies' policies and structures differed from the ACHS' required inclusions. Most notably:

- The ACHS requires an honor society's members to have completed a minimum number of semesters at an educational institution, which varies depending on the society's classification ("ACHS Bylaws", 2018). However, only 82.8% of sampled honor societies list a semester or year requirement under their membership eligibility.
- The ACHS warns that a publicly available membership application raises questions about an honor society's credibility. 16.7% of sampled societies have a publicly available application on their website.
- The ACHS requires that an honor society has a class ranking membership requirement. Only 82.8% of sampled societies list a minimum class ranking requirement.
- The ACHS states that membership fee amounts should be listed on a society's website. Only 80% of sampled societies list their membership fee amounts.

The ACHS lists seven criteria for judging the credibility of an honor society's website. This includes publicly available national officer contact information, headquarters contact

information, membership criteria, benefits of membership, membership fees, the Constitution and/or Bylaws, and the society's policies and procedures. These criteria are helpful for students when judging if a society is legitimate or not, and missing items can serve as a warning sign that a society is not credible. Through the content analysis, I found that, on average, accredited honor societies have this information available on their website 82.4% of the time.



In addition to standards that are required for eligibility, I found many areas that accredited societies have in common, even though they are not required by the ACHS. One commonality among ACHS societies is required chapter positions. 93.33% of sampled societies must have a chapter advisor, 72.41% require a chapter president, 65.52% require a Vice President, 68.97% require a Secretary, and 62.07% require a Treasurer. These positions are not required for an honor society to receive accreditation; however, given the prevalence of these positions in accredited societies, it is an area to consider when structuring a society's chapter guidelines.

In order to write the Constitution for Delta Mu Sigma, I looked at common inclusions in accredited societies' Constitutions and Bylaws. This includes an objective or purpose (96.67%), an annual report requirement (80%), information about honorary membership (93.1%), and a

dissolution statement (55.17%), among others. Using this information, I was able to clearly see the areas that should be included in Delta Mu Sigma's documents. As all of the sampled societies are accredited, the structure of their Constitutions and Bylaws provide a helpful format for constructing similarly successful documents for Delta Mu Sigma.

### **Impacts**

The results of this research have many implications for college and university honor societies. Honor societies interested in ACHS accreditation can more clearly see the rules, standards, and structures that are most likely to lead to a successful application. This can save the honor societies time and resources as they can easily see the necessary components.

Additionally, newly established honor societies will be able to format their structure and Constitution in a way that sets themselves up for accreditation. The ACHS could also benefit from this research by revising their application and credibility guidelines to more accurately represent their accredited societies. If a sizeable percentage of accredited honor societies differ from the stated requirement, the ACHS can look further into the societies that differ, the requirements of the criterion, and the standards used when evaluating honor societies.

This research helped inform my writing of the Constitution for Delta Mu Sigma. Through the content analysis, I was able to pinpoint which areas are most necessary to include in the documents. In addition, I found the common standards between accredited societies. As Delta Mu Sigma continues to expand and add more chapters, subsequent sections can be added to the Constitution based on this research. Areas to consider adding in the future include more information about national officers, a national convention, society publications, and a dissolution

statement. Using this research to construct Delta Mu Sigma's Constitution helps to guarantee the eventual accreditation of the society once the waiting period has ended.

## Appendix A

### Constitution of Delta Mu Sigma



# DELTA MU SIGMA

## THE DIGITAL MARKETING HONOR SOCIETY

### **Name**

---

This honor society shall be named Delta Mu Sigma.

### **Objective**

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Delta Mu Sigma is an honor society that recognizes academic excellence and commitment to growth, innovation, and integrity of digital marketing scholarship and practice.

### **Classifications of Membership**

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The Society shall consist of two classifications of membership:

- Undergraduate Students
  - To be eligible for membership into Delta Mu Sigma as an undergraduate student, the nominee must meet the membership requirements set forth in the “Undergraduate Student Membership Requirements” of this Constitution.
- Educator Member
  - At each initiation, the members of a chapter of Delta Mu Sigma may nominate one individual to be an honorary member of the society, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto and status as an Educator Member. Educator

members of this society represent the recognition of and connection to educators who have made a significant impact in the field of digital marketing.

### **Undergraduate Student Membership Requirements**

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Requirements of a junior student shall include:

- Commitment to giving eight hours of their time per semester during their senior year to helping the Society.
  - Juniors will have the option to purchase a membership cord and stole during their senior year if all obligations are met.
  - Not fulfilling obligations will result in the inability to purchase a membership cord and stole for graduation.
  - A junior student applying for membership into the Society must meet the minimum scholastic criteria:
    - A 3.2 cumulative grade point average (GPA)
    - Completion of 9 credit hours of marketing courses
    - Completion of the membership application and reference from a faculty member or internship supervisor

A senior student applying for membership into the Society must meet the minimum scholastic criteria:

- A 3.2 cumulative GPA *OR* a 3.0 cumulative GPA with a 3.4 GPA in marketing courses
- Completion of the membership application and reference from a faculty member or internship supervisor

All undergraduate students applying for membership into the Society must also meet the following criteria:

- The student demonstrates the highest level of ethical behavior, as demonstrated on the faculty or supervisor reference form.
- The student has shown an interest in pursuing a career in Digital Marketing, as demonstrated on the membership application.

Please note: No current undergraduate members may review the GPAs of an applicant. Only the faculty advisor and/or educator members may review an applicant's GPA.

### **Chapter Positions**

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All chapters of Delta Mu Sigma must have the following chapter positions. Other positions may be added at the discretion of the individual chapter. The positions and their required duties are as follows:

- President
  - Primary liaison between the society and the faculty advisor(s)
  - Represents the Society at any meetings that may occur on campus with a student representative
  - Will oversee the planning of the initiation ceremony
- Vice President of Communications
  - Responsible for keeping members updated on upcoming events and meetings
  - Responsible for taking notes at meetings and distributing the minutes
  - Will maintain a log of member hours
- Treasurer
  - Responsible for maintaining and controlling all chapter funds
  - Will handle dues collections and financial reporting to the national headquarters

## **National Officers**

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The founding chapter, the Alpha chapter at James Madison University, will serve as the national headquarters until five additional chapters are established at other colleges or universities.

## **Charter Requirements**

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Colleges and universities seeking to petition a charter of Delta Mu Sigma must meet the following requirements:

- The college or university must be accredited by a regional accreditation body.
- At least one digital marketing course must be offered as an elective. Examples include:
  - Digital Marketing
  - Social Media Marketing
  - Internet Marketing
    - A course description and syllabus for the class must be included with the membership application.
- The college and/or university must name a faculty advisor.
  - The faculty advisor should be housed in the Department of Marketing
  - The faculty advisor should teach, research, and/or work in the field of digital marketing
- In order to be considered in good standing, a chapter must hold at least one initiation per year.
- In order to be considered in good standing, a chapter must complete all required reporting to the national organization as required.

**Appendix B**  
Coding Sheet for Content Analysis

**Honor Society Coding Sheet**

General Information and Requirements

Name of Honor Society \_\_\_\_\_ Major Requirement (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

Year requirement \_\_\_\_\_ GPA requirement \_\_\_\_\_ Class rank requirement \_\_\_\_\_

Minimum related credits completed \_\_\_\_\_

Positions (Y/N)

Chapter Advisor/Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ President \_\_\_\_\_ Vice President \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_  
Historian \_\_\_\_\_ Nationals Officers (#) \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Officers (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

Other Positions \_\_\_\_\_

How National Officers are Elected \_\_\_\_\_

Constitution and Bylaws (Y/N)

Objective of Society \_\_\_\_\_ Motto \_\_\_\_\_ Form must go through Nationals \_\_\_\_\_

Dissolution Statement \_\_\_\_\_ National Convention \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

Each chapter required to participate \_\_\_\_\_ Annual Report Required \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, contents? \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime National Membership Fee \_\_\_\_\_ Society Publications \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter Meetings Required \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, how often? \_\_\_\_\_ Special Membership \_\_\_\_\_

Inactive after how many years? \_\_\_\_\_ Vote required to revoke a charter (# of Officers) \_\_\_\_\_

Requirements to Charter a Chapter (These are also in the Constitution)

Charter Petition Form (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, contents? \_\_\_\_\_

National Officers that Must Approve (#) \_\_\_\_\_ Accredited Programs Only (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

Organizing Committee (#) \_\_\_\_\_ New Chapter Establishment Fee (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

If Y, how much? \_\_\_\_\_ Re-establishment Fee (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, how much? \_\_\_\_\_

Min. Offering of Related Courses (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_ If Y, how much? \_\_\_\_\_

Letter from Dean/President (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

General Credibility

Publicly Available Membership Application (Y=not good) \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Profit Status \_\_\_\_\_

Grants/Fellowships/Scholarships Offered \_\_\_\_\_

Participate in (Inter)National Society Conferences \_\_\_\_\_ Full Financial Disclosure \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Content Analysis Raw Data

Theme	Criteria	Percentage	out of
<b>Membership Requirements</b>			
Major	A relevant major is required for membership	41.38%	12 29
Year	A year-standing (i.e. Junior; Senior) is required for membership	82.76%	24 29
GPA	A minimum GPA is required for membership	62.07%	18 29
Class Rank	Being in the top X% of their class is required for membership	82.76%	24 29
Credits	A minimum number of credits, or major-related credits, is required for membership	70.00%	21 30
<b>Positions</b>			
Chapter Advisor	A Chapter Advisor is required for each chapter	93.33%	28 30
President	A President is required for each chapter	72.41%	21 29
Vice President	A Vice President is required for each chapter	65.52%	19 29
Secretary	A Secretary is required for each chapter	68.97%	20 29
Treasurer	A Treasurer is required for each chapter	62.07%	18 29
Historian	A Historian is required for each chapter	17.24%	5 29
National Officers (#)	There is an average of X National Officers for the honor society	7.583	
Regional Officers	There are Regional Officers for the honor society	51.72%	15 29
<b>Constitution and Bylaws Inclusions</b>			
Objective	Constitution/Bylaws includes the society's objective or purpose	96.67%	29 30
Motto	Constitution/Bylaws includes the society's motto	37.93%	11 29
Form through Nationals	A chapter's constitution/bylaws must be approved by Nationals	44.83%	13 29
Dissolution Statement	Constitution/Bylaws includes a dissolution statement	55.17%	16 29
National Convention	The honor society has a national convention	100.00%	29 29
Chapter Participation Required	Each chapter is required to participate in the national convention	51.72%	15 29
Annual Report Required	A chapter is required to submit an annual report	80.00%	24 30
Lifetime Membership Fee	The honor society has a lifetime national membership fee	86.67%	26 30
Society Publications	The honor society has society-specific publications	93.10%	27 29
Chapter Meetings Required	Each chapter is required to have meetings	41.38%	12 29
Honorary Memberships	The honor society offers honorary memberships	93.10%	27 29
Inactive after X Years	A chapter is declared inactive after an average of X number of years	2	
<b>Charter Requirements</b>			
Charter Petition Form	A Charter Petition Form is required to establish a chapter	96.67%	29 30
Accredited Program	The program must be accredited in order to establish a chapter	93.33%	28 30
Chapter Establishment Fee	A one-time establishment fee is required to establish a chapter	64.29%	18 28
Re-establishment Fee	A re-establishment fee is required to re-establish an inactive chapter	24.14%	7 29
Minimum Offering of Related Courses	There must be a minimum number of courses in a certain area in order to establish a cha	36.67%	11 30
Letter from Dean/President	A letter of support from a program or school's Dean or President is required to establish	46.67%	14 30
<b>General Credibility</b>			
Publicly Available Membership Application	A publicly available membership application is considered uncredible	16.67%	5 30
Non-profit	The society is non-profit or not-for-profit status	86.67%	26 30
Scholarships Offered	Scholarships and grants are available to society members	73.33%	22 30
<b>Information Available on Website</b>			
National Officers Contact Information	The contact information for the National Officers is available on the website	93.33%	28 30
National Headquarters Contact Information	The contact information for the National Headquarters is available on the website	70.00%	21 30
Membership Criteria	The criteria for membership is available on the website	93.33%	28 30
Benefits of Membership	The benefits of membership into the honor society are available on the website	83.33%	25 30
Membership Fees	The amount of membership fees is available on the website	80.00%	24 30
Constitution and Bylaws	The society's constitution and/or bylaws are available on the website	93.33%	28 30
Chapter Policies and Procedures	The policies and procedures of chapters are available on the website	63.33%	19 30

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