

Students can earn 'honor' without society

I don't have a whole lot of regrets in my life, but most of them center around high school.

If I had it to do over again, I'd get more involved – join the golf team, audition for the school play, try my hand at quiz bowl. I'd spend more time with certain people and less with others.

Maybe instead of blowing so much money on prom, I'd use that money to do something with my friends that we'd actually enjoy.

I'd be less of a milquetoast and a little more aggressive toward the bullies who pestered me and my friends; three days of suspension may have been worth popping one of those neanderthals in the schnoz, just once.

But my biggest regret has to do with the National Honor Society.

Like most of my classmates who regularly got halfway-decent grades, I applied to enter the society during my junior year. I filled out the application, never once believing I wouldn't be qualified.

After all, I was one of the top 10 students in my class, my name appeared on the honor roll most semesters, and I was well-liked by most of the teachers and staff who would make the decision.

In addition, I attended a local church and youth group weekly and volunteered several weeks of my life to the mission field, in addition to other service projects.

But when the new NHS members were announced, my name wasn't on the list. I was one of just two applicants who were turned down.

When I asked why, I was told that my essay was "too short." I didn't recall seeing a length requirement on the application, but I wasn't worried about it. I let the matter drop.

When my senior year rolled around, I applied again, making sure my essay was filled out with lots of \$10 words.

This time, I was selected, and I got to put on a goofy robe and light a candle in front of the whole school. I also got to skip class for a day to go to COSI.

That was about the extent of the benefit I got from my short-lived membership in the National Honor Society. I was accepted into all of the colleges I applied to, and though I can't be sure, I highly doubt my status as an NHS member was the deciding factor for any of them.

Of course, once I entered college, nothing I did in high school mattered anymore, including my ACT and SAT scores, grades, proficiency tests and all those other things that feel like matters of life and death when you're 18.

That's why I find the limited furor concerning the Worthington City School District's decision to discontinue National Honor Society at its high schools to be baffling.

The district terminated its charter with the honor society in



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September and followed up with a explanatory letter to parents in October.

In the letter, Worthington Kilbourne High School Principal Ed Dunaway wrote, "Membership in the National Honor Society no longer commands the same respect it once held with the colleges/universities nationally. The subjective nature of selection ... has impacted more than just the college admissions officers. Parents and students are confused by why 'their' student was not selected and another student whom they did not believe was 'as deserving' was inducted."

Parents recently have begun reacting to the letter, claiming the NHS might need some work to make it equitable, but doesn't deserve to be cut.

That may be true, but in the meantime, I have a hard time believing the society will be missed. I agree with Dunaway – colleges care more about what students have done than whether their names appear on the rolls of yet another organization.

I believe that the most important political decisions take place at the local level, and the same idea is true at schools.

Students who actively try to make their schools better places are going to do more good than they will as members of a national group – and they will get noticed for it.

Instead of lamenting the loss of NHS, students might try starting their own local club or group that can replace some of the charitable activities in which NHS members took part.

I have no knowledge of the inner workings of Kilbourne's society. However, if the selection process is conducted like my own high school's, parents and students have a right to be confused.

When I was denied entry to NHS, I looked at some of the kids who did make the cut. Among them, I saw people who routinely cheated on tests and homework; people who participated in racially charged fights in parking lots after football games; people who drank, smoked and slept around as teens. And I began to wonder what the "honor" society was all about.

That leads me to my biggest regret: not using my second attempt at an NHS essay to expose my true thoughts about the society I had already deemed worthless.

Instead, I wrote what I thought the selection committee wanted to hear, and it worked. I gained a line on my resume, but I lost a little self-respect.

Now, Worthington officials have come to the same conclusion I reached 13 years ago: that NHS, as it stands, is unfair and adds little to a high schooler's experience.

Will National Honor Society be mourned in Worthington? With so many outstanding local groups and clubs offered to and being run by district students, it doesn't deserve the tears.