Staff Editorial

**Fictitious merit programs grant fake notoriety**

Line between cash scam and honorary society becomes blurred

The competitive nature of colleges and the fight to be accepted has started a craving for students to join honor societies. Anything claiming to be an “honorary” or “exclusive” society gains instant attention from prospective college attendees wanting to spice up their résumé.

Capitalizing on this, organizations have begun branding their average to bottom-line “leadership conferences” or “honor societies” as exclusive opportunities. Many of these organizations also come with hefty fees, sometimes reaching multiple thousands of dollars.

These groups also tend to borderline harass the person receiving the “honor.” Email after email and letter after letter litter the recipients’ mailbox, almost begging for new members, and new checks.

In a society where students strive so hard to impress their top colleges and employers, many of them are made vulnerable to falling in the trap that is these fake honors.

Some people have broken from these organizations and exposed them for the scam they are.

Richard M. Lerner, who works for Tufts University, endorsed an illegitimate honors program in the past, but now realizes its flaws.

“I was in effect telling parents to spend their money, which I didn’t have any business doing,”
 Lerner said.

These organizations aren’t perceived well by many universities, either. They are often viewed as wastes of money, and aren’t proven to impact college applications.

The general consensus among most colleges is that being a member of these programs isn’t an impressive feat, and that they can even give a sense of false accomplishment to the recipient.

Some hints that an organization might be fake include online applications, persistent emails or letters, stressing the monetary value of the trip, and promising things that seem too good to be true.

Other denotations can include missing organization information, like the names of executive officers or validation of a nonprofit status.

While searching for colleges and striving to better oneself, it’s important to keep a keen eye out and capitalize on only the opportunities most promising, which will truly benefit oneself in the long run.

Senior Omar Williams recognizes the importance of distinguishing real honors from fake ones.

“Since competition for college is so high, it’s really important to have a solid list of honors and extracurriculars,” Williams said. “However, it’s important that you don’t waste your time and money on fake honors.”