

**THE HONOR SOCIETY OF CINEMATIC ARTS (HSCA)  
ANNUAL LETTER TO THE MEMBERSHIP**



*2025-2026*

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## ABOUT THE HONOR SOCIETY OF CINEMATIC ARTS

The Honor Society of Cinematic Arts is the only 501(c)(3) nonprofit Society dedicated to promoting and celebrating excellence in film production and education at the high school level. The Society's mission rests on three pillars: recognizing high achieving, passionate film students through rigorous induction requirements and opportunities for advancement, awards, and scholarships; providing Members and Chapter Directors with access to educational resources and events, such as the Society's Annual Film Festival; and fostering community engagement among Members and Chapters at the local, regional, and international level. Founded in 2025, the Society launched its Pioneer Chapters in the 2026 spring semester, serving film communities at seven high schools across four continents.

*More information can be found at [honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org](https://honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org).*

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### Establish a Chapter

**Dear Members, Chapter Directors, and Partners of the Honor Society of Cinematic Arts,**

I want to begin my inaugural Letter to the Membership by expressing my immense gratitude for your participation and effort in bringing this Society to life. As a Society, we are only as strong as our Membership, and it is your belief that this Society can and should exist that has allowed us to serve you, your film programs, and many more high school film students and teachers for years to come.

HSCA was founded on the belief that high school film communities around the world deserve the same opportunities for global recognition and support as other subjects have long had through their respective honor societies. For generations, students of debate, mathematics, theater, and science have had national organizations dedicated to celebrating their achievements, connecting them with peers, and giving them a credential that speaks to their accomplishments. Film students, despite pouring the same hours into their art form, have historically had no equivalent. Our Society was founded to close that gap: to give young filmmakers and the educators who guide them an international Society that takes their work as seriously as they do and supports them as they do it.

*That founding belief only becomes reality through the work we do on your behalf, and through the record we keep of that work.*

The following Letter, which serves as our nonprofit's annual report, was created in collaboration with the Board of Directors, and has been structured into three sections:

The first section, *Looking Back*, is where I evaluate our progress toward the previous year's goals and detail how your annual dues were utilized.

The second, *Looking Forward*, is where I outline our priorities for the coming school year, including the initiatives, partnerships, and programs we intend to pursue with your support.

The third, *Looking Beyond*, is where I detail a long-term vision for our Society.

The 2025-2026 school year — our Society's first year of operation — has been a success for HSCA. As you will see later in this Letter, the 105 students across our seven Pioneer Chapters said that their semester in HSCA has been promising, fun, inspiring, and gave them a sense of belonging, and almost all Chapter Directors stated that they were very likely to recommend the Society to other educators. This strong foundation allows us to more than double the number of Chapters in the coming year; with this expansion, we will be able to refine our current educational programming to better meet the needs of the community we serve. It's an exciting time for our Society, and, while there is still much to do and much to improve upon, I couldn't be more honored to serve as your President during these formative years.

Transparent governance is at the core of our educational mission; we can only properly serve a community that thoroughly understands our progress toward this mission. This understanding is a two-way street, however, and our improvement as a Society must be driven from the same active participation you have demonstrated this past year. I invite everyone in our community to read this report. If you have any questions, comments, or ideas, please feel free to contact me at [officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org](mailto:officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org).

## STEPPING INTO GRADUATION

As I adjusted my twin cords for the final time before walking to receive my diploma, I inevitably thought about my fellow Chapter Members, and I felt a sense of nostalgia. This was odd, considering that my school's Chapter had only started a few months earlier. There was not much to be nostalgic about, and yet that feeling was there. In truth, while our Chapter was new, the environment that allowed it to sprout was deep-rooted.

For years before HSCA even existed, there had been an enduring tradition of artistic earnestness, collaborative enthusiasm, and genuine admiration among peers that could be found in the character of film students at my school. This was the community where I first found my roots as an anxious new student. Many knew this community before me, and many will after.

The culture typical of a successful Chapter was always there, visible in the excited discussions of each other's scripts and the rapt murmurs rising from huddles formed around editors' monitors. HSCA merely gave that environment a tangible symbol, a show of support to continue cultivating and celebrating that community in a world that is ever demanding of tangible credentials.

During my graduation, I probably would have ended up feeling vaguely sentimental anyway. However, the sensation of touching my cord as I made a final adjustment was a physical reminder, one that specifically directed some of my thoughts in that moment toward my filmmaking journey. Perhaps that is the purpose of symbols: to serve as a gentle, grounding nudge toward values and ideas you have always held dear.

I have always been proud to identify with my fellow filmmakers. My short time in HSCA gave that sense of community an added sense of tangibility. That is no small thing. That tangibility reminded me to reflect on it even more during the busy, tassel-filled day on which I left it behind. That tangibility allowed all its Members to proudly celebrate it, physically and visibly, on that grand graduation stage.

Wherever you are in your high school career — whether you are a veteran of your filmmaking community or an earnest newcomer, whether you are a rising senior or an incoming freshman — know that we at the Society welcome you and send you our warmest wishes. It is truly the Members who make the Chapter.

**Kai Jie Lau**

***Student Representative on the Board of Directors***

## LOOKING BACK

### Annual Feedback Form Results

Feedback forms are a running joke in high schools around the world. Every year, students and teachers are asked to fill out form after form after form, and, more often than not, the results of these forms go into a black box. I have no doubt that these forms are made with the best of intentions, but the lack of clear communication and acknowledgement of respondents' answers creates a feeling of being unheard — which in turn creates apathy and an unwillingness to participate. Active engagement and participation within our Chapters and our broader international community is at the heart of our Society's mission; accordingly, a clear, coherent, and transparent analysis of the results of our annual feedback survey is a vital tradition that we will begin this year and carry on for many years to come.

Firstly, I want to express gratitude for the high number of responses we received — especially given that the form went out during one of the busiest stretches of the school year. A little over **one in four Members** responded to the form; **six out of seven Chapter Directors** responded to the form. It is only through honest, candid feedback that we will improve; such a high response rate, especially for our first year, provides concrete, quantifiable proof that our Society has been founded by an active community that believes in furthering our collective mission of supporting high school film education. Thank you very much.

The survey evaluated three core areas within HSCA: Our Services, Our Policies, and Our Chapters. Likewise, the following analysis is structured around these three sections.



**neither satisfied nor dissatisfied** with the educational resources. The creation of impactful educational resources is at the core of our mission; making our educational resources more valuable is an area of improvement for the coming school year. This feedback has been addressed under *Looking Forward*, Objective One of this Letter.

The Member Portal serves as the central digital interface for our Membership’s experience in our Society. When asked about the Portal’s ease of navigation, both Members and Chapter Directors described it as **generally easy to navigate** — though not effortlessly so. This is a satisfactory start, but I feel we can do better; a program to better orient our community to the Portal is described under *Looking Forward*, Objective Four of this Letter.

## OUR POLICIES

Our most consequential policy is the requirements Members must meet to maintain induction. Although we consulted a number of film educators while developing these requirements, it’s essential that we regularly reassess whether they remain sufficiently challenging. When respondents were asked whether they found the requirements to maintain induction appropriately challenging, not challenging enough, or overly challenging, nearly all said that they believed the requirements to maintain induction were **appropriately challenging**. A small minority wished they were more demanding, but our Society overwhelmingly found the requirement’s current level of rigor to be correct.

## OUR CHAPTERS

Expansion is vital to the sustainability of our Society. While our initiatives to recruit new Chapters are further detailed under *Looking Forward*, Objective Five of this Letter, Chapter-level expansion is also an important metric. Two-thirds of respondent Chapter Directors noted that their Chapter size will **increase** for the 2026-2027 school year; one-third of respondent Chapter Directors noted that their Chapter size will **remain relatively the same size**; and no respondent Chapter Directors noted that their Chapter size will decrease.

Members were asked to select an area for improvement within their local Chapters; students consistently noted that they wished their Chapter conducted a greater **range of activities** and held a more **regular meeting schedule**. These results are not unexpected during a Chapter’s first semester of operation, however; as Chapter-level systems and routines are cemented in the coming years, it is likely that these areas for improvement will be less prominently noted.

## Membership Audit Results

Like all honor societies, we are constantly faced with a balancing act: if our mission is to support high school film programs by giving students additional opportunities and resources, then we must keep our induction requirements attainable; if our mission is to support high school film programs by empowering film teachers, then we must trust our Chapter Directors to make decisions regarding a student's induction status; but if our mission is to support high school film programs by creating a place where high-achieving film students can be recognized for their work — and if this recognition is to mean anything — then we must keep our induction requirements standardized across our Chapters. Accordingly, we annually audit a portion of our Members across every Chapter to ensure compliance with our induction policies.

This year's audit of 66 out of 80 eligible Members and Officers revealed that Chapter Directors and Officers were generally following our policies and safeguarding the value of induction into our Society. There was a small amount of confusion regarding the difference between points and minutes of film; while this was easily correctable on a case-by-case basis, we are implementing a program to better orient our Chapter Directors and Members to this nuance. This program is detailed under *Looking Forward*, Objective Four of this Letter.

## Financial Report

Transparency in how we utilize your annual dues is at the forefront of our mission; the following section provides an overview of our expenses and revenues. A more detailed financial report can be found in our Form 990 filing with the Internal Revenue Service of the United States of America. You can find this filing on our website and on the IRS database. It is worth noting that, while we were within the gross receipts threshold to file Form 990-N, which provides very little public information on our financial standing, we determined that a full Form 990 filing was most aligned with our mission.

### CONTEXT

Our Society is considered a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit corporation by the IRS and is exempt from paying income tax on revenue related to our exempt activities, as described in our Bylaws and most recent Form 990 filing. The Society's fiscal year roughly follows the United States academic school year and runs from July through June of the following year. This section covers the Society's activities for its first fiscal year, which ran from July 2025 to June 2026.

### REVENUE

Our Society's revenue can be broken into two primary categories: program service revenue (the annual dues we collect) and contributions (donations). We collected \$3,108 in annual dues alongside a \$12,000 contribution.

### EXPENSES

Our Society's expenses can be broken into three primary categories: program service expenses, management and general expenses, and fundraising expenses. In total, we spent \$5,369 on program service expenses (73.47%), \$1,061 on management and general expenses (14.52%), and \$879 on fundraising expenses (12.01%). Notable expenditures within these categories include:

Within program service expenses, we spent \$4,928 on educational programming, including the development, creation, dissemination, and maintenance of our educational resources; the development and maintenance of our educational partnerships with external organizations; and the development, optimization, and ongoing maintenance of our Member Portal. Additionally, we spent \$441 on the manufacturing and delivery of graduation regalia for our Members.

Within management and general expenses, we spent \$524 on governmental filings and compliance. We expect this expense category to decrease significantly for the 2026-2027 fiscal year now that initial governmental applications and filings are complete.

Within fundraising expenses, we spent \$762 on regalia and merchandise at high school film festivals as part of our grassroots, community-support-centric Chapter recruitment program.

## **COMPENSATION**

No Director or Officer of the Society was compensated. We spent \$1,026 compensating independent contractors to complete web development and other tasks relating to our educational programming.

## **CHAPTER GRANT INITIATIVE**

We are dedicated to bringing the power of an education in the cinematic arts to all classrooms; we vehemently believe that filmmaking should be accessible to all students. As part of this commitment, schools that are unable to afford our annual dues, or schools that serve a special needs community, are able to apply for a waiver or reduction in their Chapter's annual dues. Two Chapters received a need-based reduction in annual dues this year. Complete reporting on the impact of the Chapter Grant Initiative will be compiled for the 2026-2027 Letter to the Membership and beyond.

## **OUTLOOK**

As our Society expands for the coming school year, we expect our annual dues to be able to sustain our program service expenses, allowing us to invest the remainder of the \$12,000 contribution into our expansion. More information on this program can be found under *Looking Forward*, Objective Five of this Letter.

## LOOKING FORWARD: PRIORITIES FOR 2026-2027

As we move into our Society's second year of operation, and our Membership moves into the 2026-2027 school year, we will focus on the following five objectives.

### Objective One: Refine & Evolve Our Educational Resources

The educational resources we provide our Members and Chapter Directors with access to are a core tenet of our mission, and each educational resource should serve as a force multiplier for our students and teachers. Throughout the coming school year, we will continue to monitor usage metrics for our educational resources and solicit further feedback regarding our current and prospective offerings. From these results, we will refine and evolve our offerings to maximize educational value for our Membership. We will be deliberate in allocating funds and talent to resources with greater value, and we will work to deepen our external educational resource partnerships to fill gaps in our offerings. As we work toward maximizing our educational resources, you may see a change in our offerings, but any change will be an improvement on what we currently provide.

### Objective Two: Invest in the Recognition of Members & Events

We are excited to announce that we will offer a number of opportunities for further recognition and celebration amongst our Members for the coming school year.

We will first charter an evaluation committee made up of Directors of the Board, Chapter Directors, and industry professionals to ensure that the evaluation of student work follows a rigorous, standardized, and fair process. This jury will support the evaluation of student work across our Society's programs, including our Library of Exemplary Student Film Work, scholarship applications, our Annual Film Festival, and, in future years, award nominations.

Additionally, our Annual Film Festival, the primary opportunity for recognition across our international community, will retain its core objective of celebrating our community but will adopt a three-pillar approach that simultaneously makes the festival a more valuable event for our Membership while remaining realistically-attainable within our resources:

| <i>Screening</i>                                                                                                                       | <i>Critique</i>                                                                                                      | <i>Workshop</i>                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| We will continue to release a recording of the Film Festival, made up of Official Selections as determined by the aforementioned jury. | All Official Selections will receive detailed feedback on their films from the jury and / or industry professionals. | We will host a live online workshop by an industry professional for all Official Selections and Chapter Directors. |

Lastly, we are thrilled to announce that we are partnering with the New York School of Visual Arts to provide up to five students with a scholarship that covers their tuition and housing expenses for their [2027 Summer Pre-college Film Production Workshop in New York City](#). More information on applications for this incredible opportunity will be released at the beginning of the fall semester.

### **Objective Three: Streamline Regalia & Merchandise Delivery**

While most honor cord deliveries went smoothly, and every Chapter received its regalia in time for graduation, a number of deliveries created real difficulties for our Chapter Directors — an experience that fell short of what our Chapter Directors deserve, and one we take full responsibility for. We have already implemented changes to address this on the Member Portal, including collecting phone numbers and more-complete addresses from our Chapter Directors, and we have re-evaluated our last-mile delivery service partners. Additionally, we will manufacture and ship honor cords earlier in the year; we will provide each Chapter Director with accurate tracking information for their shipment. These measures will reduce the likelihood of a failed delivery, thus ensuring that receiving honor cords is a positive, smooth experience for our Chapter Directors.

#### **Objective Four: Create Orientation Program & Revise Handbook for Clarity**

As we welcome our new Chapters within the coming weeks, we will release a short digital orientation program that covers important aspects of HSCA policy. Accompanying this series of videos will be a tutorial for the Member Portal. All Members, Officers, Chapter Directors, and Associates — whether new or returning — are encouraged to use this program to better understand our Society's policies and the Member Portal. We have also revised the Chapter & Membership Handbook for clarity, notably adding a frequently asked questions section for Members and Chapter Directors to review.

#### **Objective Five: Vigorously Recruit Chapters**

My priority for this coming year is to make our Membership's experience in our Society as valuable and positive as possible. Chapter recruitment is and always will be secondary to this priority. Notwithstanding this, it must also be recognized that increasing the number of Chapters within the Society increases the amount of annual dues we collect, which, in turn, increases the number of resources we can put toward our mission. Accordingly, while my greatest concern is the experience of our current Membership, we will continue to vigorously recruit Chapters throughout the coming school year. Our strategy primarily rests on the use of warm introductions from current Chapter Directors, but we are also testing a large-scale outreach method through our partnership with the All American High School Film Festival in October. Nevertheless, our primary source of expansion is and will continue to be word of mouth generated by a positive experience in HSCA. If you know of an educator who you feel could benefit from joining our Society, we would greatly appreciate the introduction.

## LOOKING BEYOND: LONG-TERM PRIORITIES

Proper stewardship of our Society requires us to look both to the immediate school year and to the next five years; this section details a long-term vision for HSCA, and how each long-term objective relates to the short-term objectives detailed under *Looking Forward*.

### Objective One: Educational Resources

We will continue to revisit and refine our educational resources to ensure that they provide as much value to our Membership as possible. In the long-term, the resources we provide our community — both those produced by the Society and those produced by our external partners — will not necessarily be a larger collection but rather a more precisely valuable one.

### Objective Two: Recognition of Members

Within the coming years, we aim to open opportunities for additional awards and scholarships, notably our *Member in Veritate* and *Laureate of the Society* awards. We also plan to transition to an in-person Annual Film Festival as soon as possible, provided we reach a critical mass of Chapters (and thus resources) that allows us to sustainably do so.

### Objectives Three & Four: Operational Excellence

High school film students are incredibly busy; high school film educators are even busier. Since our Society's founding, we have focused on making running a Chapter as seamless as possible — allowing Chapter Directors and Officers to focus more on organizing activities and serving their communities and less on ordering honor cords and completing paperwork. We will regularly assess our operational processes to make being a part of HSCA as frictionless as possible, especially in regards to the Member Portal, billing, regalia, and tracking Members' progress toward the requirements to maintain induction.

## **Objective Five: Chapter Recruitment**

The experience of our Members and Chapter Directors will continue to be the material that fuels our Society's growth. Looking into the future, we do not envision HSCA having built a large recruitment machine designed to grow our numbers as quickly as possible. Rather, we envision a Society that has grown mostly on the strength of its own reputation. While Chapter recruitment will always be a focus — we must grow as a Society if we wish to, for example, hold our own awards, scholarships, and in-person Annual Film Festival — growth is not something we intend to manufacture; it is something we intend to earn, one Chapter at a time.

## CONCLUSION

As this Letter concludes, and, with its conclusion, a yearly tradition of transparent governance begins, it's important to recognize that our first year gave us a great deal to be proud of: seven Pioneer Chapters, comprised of seven tireless Chapter Directors and 105 passionate high school film students, located across four continents; a Membership that overwhelmingly found value in our services; and a foundation stable enough to more than double our size in the year ahead. It is perhaps more important, however, to recognize the work still in front of us, as detailed in the short-term and long-term objectives above.

None of what comes next is possible without you. Every objective in this Letter depends on the same eager, earnest engagement and participation that has carried us through our first year. As much as I would like to claim that the true value of being in our Society comes from a top down approach, I can't.

*The true value of HSCA lies in the engagement, enthusiasm, and effort of every Member, Officer, and Chapter Director. It lies in the belief that high school filmmakers deserve a Society of their own.*

Thank you for being in that community and for making our first year such a success. I am deeply honored to serve you, and I cannot wait to see what we build together in the years to come.

Feel free to reach out at any time to [officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org](mailto:officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org) — my door is always open.



Sebastian Street

*President of the Society*

## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Society is governed by an uncompensated Board of Directors, who oversee the activities of the President of the Society and craft a vision forward for the Society. The President of the Society leads all Staff in the day-to-day fulfillment of HSCA's services and programs. No Director or Officer was compensated during the 2025-2026 fiscal year. While we don't currently have open Board positions, we're always glad to hear from educators and professionals interested in future involvement; feel free to contact [officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org](mailto:officeofthepresident@honorsocietyofcinematicarts.org) to learn more.

The Board of Directors are as follows:

**Sebastian Street, *Chairman of the Board***

President of the Society

**Bingqing Liu, *Treasurer of the Board***

Chief Operating & Financial Officer

**Kai Jie Lau, *Secretary of the Board***

Student Representative from HSCA Chapter One

**Lawrence Shackelford, *Director of the Board***

Film Educator; Co-Author, Examiner, & Workshop Lead of the Original IB Film Program

**Erick Pessôa, *Director of the Board***

Founder of the Clash of the Titans Film Festival; Founder of TeachingIBFilm.com; IB Film Educator

**Tom Schulz, *Director of the Board***

Veteran Theater & Film Educator; Advocate for Young Artists Since 1992

**Audrey So, *Director of the Board***

Award Winning Filmmaker & USC Film Production Student

## OUR PIONEER CHAPTERS

Our Society officially launched during the spring 2026 semester with seven Pioneer Chapters, listed below:

**Chapter 1** | *Singapore American School*  
Singapore

**Chapter 2** | *International School of Kuala Lumpur*  
Malaysia

**Chapter 10** | *American School of Paris*  
France

**Chapter 22** | *American School of Doha*  
Qatar

**Chapter 37** | *Auburn High School*  
Illinois, United States of America

**Chapter 42** | *Golden Valley High School Merced*  
California, United States of America

**Chapter 61** | *American School of Brasilia*  
Brazil