The Impact of CACREP Accreditation: A Multiway Frequency Analysis of Ethics Violations and Sanctions

Trigg A. Even and Chester R. Robinson

The impact of CACREP accreditation on counselor competency has received little empirical investigation. Differences in the frequency and type of ethical misconduct between graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited counselor education programs were investigated. Results of a multiway frequency analysis indicated that fully licensed graduates of CACREP-accredited programs were sanctioned for ethical misconduct significantly less frequently than were graduates of non-CACREP-accredited programs. Additionally, the accreditation factor was among the highest-ranking parameter estimates of expected cell frequencies.

Keywords: CACREP, ethics, multiway frequency analysis

One of the most critical issues facing counselor education today is whether graduates of counselor education programs are competent to practice independently (Adams, 2006; Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002; Levitt, 2004). Because of gatekeeping policies and procedures, some students who demonstrate personal and professional liabilities do not continue toward graduation and licensure (Bradey & Post, 1991; Lumadue & Duffy, 1999; Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006; Tjeltveit, 1999). However, the majority of students who enter counselor education programs do graduate and continue toward licensure. So, then, the assumption of any profession and the public that embraces its service is that certified and licensed members of that profession have demonstrated a minimum degree of competence. By the nature of their membership in the profession, they agree to adhere to the standards of that profession, to participate in maintaining—if not increasing—public trust in and voluntary receipt of professional services, and to advocate for and protect that profession’s collective identity.

Regrettably, ethical misconduct—defined here as acts of commission or omission that directly violate the standards of the profession as reflected in various codes of ethics and state licensure laws and regulations—draws both question and concern about how counselors are trained and socialized into the profession. Although the prevalence of confirmed ethics and licensure violations is limited to just 0.5% to 1% of total membership (Neukrug, Milliken, & Walden, 2001), Gentry (2007) estimated that 10% of counselors are actively violating an ethics code at any given time. Ethical misconduct harms clients, counselors, and public trust (Welfel, 1998) while raising criticism about counselor professionalism, competence, and congruence with the larger professional identity displayed by most counselors. Because ensuring competence among counselor education graduates is of critical importance and because ethical conduct is positioned as hallmark evidence for competence, those factors that potentially affect the behaviors that counselors display should be assessed.

Contributors to this literature believe that ethics training matters. Mascari and Webber (2006) noted that a slippery slope toward engaging in ethical misconduct resulted from the interaction of problems of professional identity and the effects of inadequate training. Freeman (2000) stated that students who graduate from counselor education programs may be ill-prepared to manage ethical dilemmas. Although training in ethics may have steadily increased in counselor education (Colby & Long, 1994; Neukrug et al., 2001; Urofsky & Engels, 2003), it appears that the content and delivery of ethics education varies widely (Downs, 2003; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004). Hill (2004) reported that “research to date has provided little clear evidence of the impact of instruction in ethics on the ethics of professional counselors” (p. 185).

In counselor education, ethics instruction is delivered via two primary methods. Hill (2004) reported that approximately one fourth of counselor education programs preferred a stand-alone ethics course. It appears that most counselor education programs prefer an infused or integrated approach to teaching ethics. Because ethics was believed to be an essential component of the counselor education curriculum, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) required accredited programs to address ethics regardless of specialty area but did not specify the manner of delivery.

Since its inception in 1981, CACREP has functioned as the primary accrediting organization for the counseling profession. The CACREP (2009) Standards are standards by which counselor education programs are evaluated and subsequently granted or denied accreditation. Generally, CACREP’s influence on counselor education curricula has been perceived as

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favorable (Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan, & Rahill, 2002; McGlothlin & Davis, 2004; Milsom & Akos, 2005; Vacc, 1992). However, CACREP's impact on variables other than factual knowledge (e.g., professional competence, skills, and efficacy) rarely has been investigated empirically. Although authors have attempted to correlate CACREP accreditation with hiring practices and employment outlook (Schmidt, 1992) and specialization credentials (Wilson, Conyne, & Ward, 1994), several authors have indicated that research has failed to produce empirical support for the assumption that students completing a CACREP-accredited training program demonstrate superior knowledge or skills when compared with graduates of non-CACREP-accredited programs (Adams, 2000; McGlothlin & Davis, 2004; Schmidt, 1999; Vacc, 1992).

Because meaningful differences are believed to exist among counselor education training programs and graduates may be entering the profession with varying degrees of knowledge, skills, and socialization, a call to action toward pursuing empirical validation of counselor education accreditation and its related curriculum standards resounds in the literature (Adams, 2006; Bobby & Kondor, 1992; Houser, 1998; Sweeney, 1992; Vacc & Charkow, 1999; Weinrach & Thomas, 1993).

Method

This study investigated the differences between graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited counselor education programs on ethical conduct as measured by the frequency and type of ethical violations. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine to what extent the frequency and type of ethical violations differ among graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited programs, among graduates receiving isolated and infused ethics training, and to what extent accreditation, ethics training, years in service, and graduate degree interact to account for the frequency of ethical violations.

Participants and Sample Size

Participants for this study were fully licensed professional counselors who had been sanctioned (e.g., license temporarily suspended, license revoked, formal reprimand) by their respective state licensing boards. In this study, each case of ethical misconduct represented one individual licensed professional counselor; violations were delimited to a single violation for each counselor represented. On the basis of previous research (American Association of State Counseling Boards [AASCBB], 2008; Neukrug et al., 2001), the total available sample for this study was estimated to be between 750 and 1,500 cases of ethical misconduct. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) recommended sampling 5 times the number of cells for statistical procedures based on the chi-square statistic. For this $2 \times 2 \times 4 \times 2$ design, a national sample ($N = 453$) of sufficient size was secured.

Variables

Two primary dichotomous categorical variables (accreditation and ethics training) were included as well as two additional categorical variables (years in service and graduate degree). The accreditation variable, classified as CACREP-accredited or non-CACREP-accredited, reflected the accreditation status of the counselors’ graduate programs at the time of program completion. This information was secured from the specific edition of Counselor Preparation (Clawson, Henderson, Schweiger, & Collins, 2004; Hollis, 1999; Hollis & Wantz, 1971, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1997; Schweiger, Henderson, Clawson, Collins, & Nuckolls, 2007) relative to each participant’s date of program completion. The ethics training variable, classified as isolated or infused, reflected the primary type of ethics training the counselor received during her or his graduate training. Counselor Preparation and handbooks from each degree-granting institution were consulted. If the curriculum specified a formal, isolated course in ethics, it was classified as such.

Archived data related to the counselors’ highest graduate degree earned prior to the ethics violation or sanction and years in service (from original license issue date to the date of violation or sanction) were secured. Demographic information (age, gender, and ethnicity) collected by state licensing boards was obtained for only a few licensees and was therefore not included in the final data analysis. In addition, because information pertaining to practice setting (i.e., school, community, private practice) or specialty credential (i.e., marriage and family, rehabilitation, substance abuse) was not readily available, these variables were not assessed in the study.

Research Design

A chi-square analysis was used to investigate the statistical significance of the differences in observed and expected ethical misconduct frequencies for each of the accreditation and ethics training variables (Howell, 2007; Wickens, 1989). A multiway frequency analysis (MFA) was used to investigate the interaction of accreditation, ethics training, years in service, and graduate degree for predicting expected cell frequencies. MFA is a nonparametric statistical procedure for discrete variables with two or more levels. An extension of the chi-square for goodness-of-fit technique, MFA results in a model of expected cell frequencies that best predicts the observed cell frequencies and uses the most conservative number of variables to do so (Agresti, 2002; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Procedure

Application was made to state licensing boards for release of anonymous information (no names or license numbers were requested). Some state licensing boards released the information directly to the principal investigator (the first author) through encrypted electronic or postal mail. Many
state licensing boards directed the principal investigator to a disciplinary actions section or similar section of their state's publicly accessible Internet database where the information was retrieved, with or without submitting a fee. The following data pertaining to individual ethics violation cases were requested or queried from state licensing boards: type of violation, date of violation, sanction imposed, initial date of licensure, name of degree-granting institution(s), and date(s) of graduate program completion.

The appropriate edition of Counselor Preparation and/or institutional program handbooks were consulted for each ethics violation case to determine the accreditation status and ethics training relative to the date of graduate training completion. If the sanctioned counselor earned more than one counseling-related degree, the degree obtained prior to the ethics violation was used for documenting accreditation status and ethics training. If the participant earned more than one counseling-related degree prior to the ethics violation, and one degree was from a CACREP-accredited program, the data entry was coded to reflect CACREP accreditation. In short, if a graduate-level degree was earned from a CACREP-accredited program prior to the violation, the case was coded as a CACREP graduate. Similarly, if the licensee holding two counseling-related degrees completed an isolated ethics course in one program and not the other prior to the documented ethical misconduct, the data entry was classified to reflect an isolated ethics course.

Data Analysis
Chi-square analysis, and by extension MFA, are nonparametric statistical procedures that require certain assumptions to be made prior to analysis. The assumptions of independence, inclusion of nonoccurrences, adequacy of sample size, adequacy of expected frequencies, and absence of outliers were analyzed prior to performing the statistical procedures. A chi-square analysis was used to discern the relationship between accreditation status and the frequency of ethics violations. This procedure was used to investigate whether the observed and expected frequencies were significantly different across accreditation status (Green & Salkind, 2008).

Additionally, a chi-square analysis was used to investigate whether the observed and expected frequencies were significantly different across ethics training pedagogies (Green & Salkind, 2008). As a measure of effect size and practical significance, Cramér's $V$ was used to assess the strength of the association between each of the accreditation and ethics training variables and the frequency of ethics violations (Howell, 2007).

As an extension of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, the goal of MFA is to locate a model that best fits the data with as few variables as possible. According to Howell (2007), this procedure is useful in building a model that best fits the data using the least possible number of variables. The goal of MFA was to analyze the interaction of variables while locating a model that accounted for observed and expected frequencies being equal and an approximate chi-square statistic, $\chi^2 = 0.00$.

The parameter estimate, lambda, was used to measure the degree of practical significance for each variable in the model; lambda returns an estimate of the importance of each variable in influencing the expected frequency in each cell. Furthermore, lambda was interpreted by examining the relative strength and statistical significance for each effect in the model.

Results
The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the frequency of ethical violations differed among fully licensed graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited programs, among counselors who received isolated and infused ethics training, and the extent to which accreditation, ethics training, years in service, and graduate degree interact to account for the frequency of ethics violations. There was a significant difference in the frequency of ethics violations among CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited program graduates. The difference in the frequency of ethics violations among those receiving isolated and infused ethics training was not significant. In addition, the interaction of accreditation, ethics training, years in service, and graduate degree was analyzed, producing a model with significant two-way interaction effects to predict the frequency of ethics violations among this sample.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample
A national sample of 453 ethics violation cases that represented 453 fully licensed professional counselors was obtained, representing 31 state licensing boards (63%). The majority of ethics violations occurred among counselors who graduated from a non-CACREP-accredited training program (81.7%, $n = 370$). Counselors receiving an isolated ethics training course represented 47.2% ($n = 214$) of ethics violation cases. The median number of years in service prior to the ethics violation or sanction was 7.55 years. The majority of counselors committing an ethics violation that resulted in sanctions had earned a master's degree (81%, $n = 367$).

The primary violations committed by this representative sample were categorized according to the organizational scheme used by Strom-Gottfried (2000) and Phelan (2007), with the exception that we added a category for criminal convictions adjudicated by another entity. Some state boards did not report the specific violation(s). The most frequent violations for this national sample related to the competency of the professional (27.6%). This category included practicing outside of the scope of one's training and experience and practicing while impaired due to substance use or mental health matters. Ethics violations reflecting a violation of the professional boundary, which included both sexual and nonsexual dual relationships, accounted for 22.3% of violations. Finally, approximately 10% of violations related to a breach of confidentiality.

State licensing boards rarely deliver one sanction. To account for this in the current study and to adhere to the model...
assumptions for MFA, a categorical scheme was developed to record the primary sanction delivered with an additional category for sanctions delivered in excess of the primary sanction. These so-called plus categories included fines, mandatory supervision, mandatory training, and so on. Public reprimand plus additional sanctions was the sanction most commonly used by state licensing boards with this national sample. With respect to this national sample, 61.3% of counselors received a sanction that permitted them to continue practicing. The use of voluntary surrender or revocation of license was used as a sanction in 24.9% of ethics violation cases (n = 113).

Accreditation’s Impact on the Frequency of Ethical Misconduct

To determine the extent to which the frequency of ethics and licensure violations differed between licensed professional counselors who graduated from CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited counselor education programs, a single-variable chi-square test was used. As shown in Table 1, it is evident that only 18.3% (n = 83) of those committing an ethics or licensure violation graduated from a CACREP-accredited program, whereas 81.7% (n = 370) completed their training with a non-CACREP-accredited program.

A significant difference in the frequency of ethics violations was found between those in the CACREP-accredited group relative to the non-CACREP-accredited group, \( \chi^2(1, N = 453) = 181.83, p < .001 \). A chi-square test of independence revealed that there was not a significant association between type of sanction and accreditation status, likelihood ratio (LR) \( \chi^2(df = 1) = 31.54, p < .001 \), Cramér’s \( V = .272, \lambda = 5.47 \). More frequent ethical violations were evident in the isolated training group for CACREP accreditation relative to the non-CACREP-accredited group.

Accreditation’s Importance in Predicting Ethical Misconduct

MFA was used to determine the relative importance of accreditation in predicting cell frequencies within a model also containing ethics training, years in practice, and graduate degree. Preliminary investigation of the expected frequencies identified one cell with an expected frequency of 0 and nine of the 32 (28%) cells with expected frequencies less than 5. Both Agresti (2002) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) offered the suggestion to deal with this violation of the adequacy of expected frequencies model assumption by collapsing one of the variables. Because only the years in service variable contained more than two levels, we decided to retain all levels of variables in the tested model, despite the potential loss of statistical power (Wickens, 1989). A post hoc power analysis was conducted, revealing that for a calculated effect size \( \omega = .34 \), power was sufficient for this study \( (1 - \beta) = .99 \).

A saturated loglinear model with all one-way, two-way, three-way, and four-way effects was examined. As shown in Table 2, the LR \( \chi^2 \) values for the overall effects showed that the two-way effects were the highest order effects to achieve significance. No three-way or four-way effects were evident. Additionally, it is apparent by examining partial association \( \chi^2 \) values that only the Accreditation \( \times \) Ethics Training two-way effect and one-way effects for accreditation, years of service, and graduate degree achieved significance. Backward solution statistics identified a model with the same two-way

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive, Ethics Training, Years in Service, and Graduate Degree</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CACREP</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CACREP</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>47.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infused</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>52.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years in service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>21.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>35.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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</table>

Note. \( N = 453 \). CACREP = Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Partial ( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>3-Way Effects</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Ethical Training ( \times ) Years in Service</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Years in Service ( \times ) Degree</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Ethical Training ( \times ) Degree</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Service ( \times ) Ethical Training ( \times ) Degree</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.946</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Way Effects</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Ethical Training</td>
<td>31.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; .001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Years in Service</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation ( \times ) Degree</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Service ( \times ) Ethical Training</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years in Service ( \times ) Degree</td>
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<td>.183</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical Training ( \times ) Degree</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1-Way Effects</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>196.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; .001*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical training</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in service</td>
<td>43.24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; .001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>187.88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; .001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*p < .05.
Accreditation × Ethics Training and three one-way effects (accreditation, years in service, graduate degree) as best fitting, LRχ²(df = 21) = 24.102, p = .288. That the LR χ² value is not significant means that the model adequately fits the data. A custom model using all significant effects was assessed and also was found to be not significant, LR χ²(df = 24) = 33.58, p = .092, meaning that the significant one-way and two-way effects reproduced the observed frequencies in the best fitting model. A visual inspection of plotted residuals confirmed that the observed standardized residuals were acceptably close to those that were expected.

Standardized parameter estimates for the significant two-way effect and three one-way effects were examined. Accreditation, specifically the elevated frequency of non-CACREP-accredited program graduates, was the third most important predictor of expected cell frequencies above and beyond the other effects, λ = −10.25, p < .001. The size of the Accreditation × Ethics Training effect was also significant, λ = 5.47, p < .001. Table 3 displays the rank order of standardized parameter estimates and their level of significance.

**Discussion**

This study is among the first attempts at empirically validating CACREP’s impact on outcome variables. Both Adams (2000) and Scott (2000) discovered that CACREP-accredited graduates performed better on the National Counselor Exam than did non-CACREP-accredited graduates. These findings suggested that graduates of CACREP-accredited programs were more knowledgeable in the CACREP core and work–behavior content areas assessed by the National Counselor Exam. However, Freeman, Engels, and Altekruse (2004), Nucci (2002), and others (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; Gould, 2004; Kerl et al., 2002) proposed that knowledge of ethics and professional conduct does not necessarily translate to actual ethical conduct. Therefore, ethical behavior as measured by ethical violations was proposed by this study to more accurately capture the construct of ethics as professional competence than conceptual knowledge.

The results of this study provide empirical support for the CACREP standards. Among a national sample of fully licensed professionals, counselors who graduated from CACREP-accredited programs committed ethical misconduct less frequently than those who graduated from non-CACREP-accredited programs. In addition, accreditation was among the highest ranking parameter estimates for predicting expected cell frequencies. Although the researchers were not able to include all factors originally proposed as potentially impactful on the frequency of ethical misconduct, those that were available and retained for analysis were used to test conceptual assumptions about the effects of a graduate degree on one facet of the skill and professionalism that counselors actually display.

Ethical misconduct jeopardizes public trust in professional counseling. Although a very small percentage of fully licensed professional counselors actually commit ethical misconduct, their actions discredit the integrity of the entire profession. The highest ranking category of ethics violations among this sample was related to competent practice. Boundary violations, which included both sexual and nonsexual dual relationships, were the second highest ranking category.

For comparison with existing research, Neukrug et al. (2001) reported that the highest ranking category of ethical misconduct was related to nonsexual dual relationships. Adding violations for sexual dual relationships, a total of 31% of violations were reported in this category. In the current study, boundary violations accounted for 22.3% of violations. There are several reasons why there appears to be a discrepancy between the findings of the current study and existing research. First, violations are categorized differently from state to state and from one study to the next. Neukrug et al. surveyed state licensing board representatives, all of whom likely returned violations data according to the categorical scheme used by their respective ethics committees. A violation categorized by one state as related to competence might be categorized by another as related to poor professional practices. This explanation is consistent with Mascari’s (2004) conclusion that comparison of violations data between states and membership organizations is almost impossible.

Another explanation is that, with respect to the current study, only confirmed violations that led to sanction and only those violations committed by fully licensed professional counselors were assessed. In previous research, data related to complaints received and data related to violations committed by unlicensed or temporarily licensed individuals were included.

Finally, the current study categorized ethical misconduct by the primary violation that led to sanction only. Single-category violations are rare. Most cases of ethical misconduct result in found violations in more than one category. Comparable existing research included frequency counts of all violations, including multiple violations committed by a single individual. For this study, because independence of observations is one model assumption that must be met for statistical analyses based on the chi-square statistic, we were careful to count and categorize only once for the primary violation that led to sanction.

With respect to sanctions delivered by state licensing boards, comparison with existing research is tentative at

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rank Order of Standardized Parameter Estimates</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.11</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in service (10 or more)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−10.25</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in service (0–1)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>−5.98</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation × Ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−5.47</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in service (6–9)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>−3.82</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics training</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>−3.52</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in service (2–5)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>−1.88</td>
<td>.060</td>
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The Impact of CACREP Accreditation

best. Although the percentages of reprimand and probation sanctions are similar to Neukrug et al.'s (2001) findings, the frequency of the revocation sanction is substantially lower in the current study. Of note is the fact that the current study collected archived data from state licensing boards since board inception, a span in some cases of 30 or more years. Neukrug et al. limited their data collection to 1 calendar year.

The largest problem with respect to comparing the current study with other recent national samples of ethics violation and sanction data is that data were largely unavailable. For example, the AASCB (2008) reported that the majority of state licensing board respondents returned data categorized as unspecified sanctions. Therefore, it is believed that the percentages and rank order of sanctions found in the current study are likely to be a more accurate assessment of the sanctions counselors actually receive and state licensing board practices and preferences over time.

More than 8 out of 10 counselors in this study who were sanctioned by state licensing boards graduated from non-CACREP-accredited counselor education programs (n = 370). To date, there is only one other study known to the authors that assessed accreditation status with respect to ethics and licensure violations. Mascari (as cited in Mascari & Webber, 2006) evaluated ethics violations among counselors (n = 19) licensed by one state during a 3-year period. Mascari reported that just 11% were graduates of a CACREP-accredited counselor education program.

Mascari (as cited in Mascari & Webber, 2006) also reported on the effect of ethics instruction by indicating that just 16% of sanctioned counselors completed an ethics training course. A preference for isolated ethics training was found among counselor educators (Hill, 1999). In addition, although 62.2% of respondents in Hill's study indicated that isolated ethics training was required, because the sample size was small (n = 74) and only CACREP-accredited program representatives were surveyed, the findings in the current study appear to more accurately depict the distribution of ethics training type across counselors who proceed to commit ethics violations.

Consistent with existing research (Downs, 2003; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Reetz & Jacobs, 2000; Stadler & Paul, 1986), it is likely that the counselors in this study encountered various pedagogical methods of ethics instruction, with respect to the delivery format of the content, the specific content taught, and the learning objectives and activities used. Therefore, the impact of the content and manner of delivery of ethics training on preventing or reducing ethical misconduct is not known. Per the results of the current study, there is not a statistically significant relationship between type of ethics training received during graduate training and ethical misconduct. Further assessment of ethics education is particularly important considering Hill's (2004) report that 68.9% of counselor educators believed ethics training is more important than other subjects in the counselor education curriculum.

Implications

Linde's (2007) report on the 20/20 Vision for the Future of Counseling clearly implies that the counseling profession is pursuing a strengthened, unified identity that promotes research-based counseling and counselor education standards while advocating for client welfare and public protection. This study investigated empirically the assumption that meaningful differences exist in counselor education training programs and curriculum standards. The finding that accreditation affects prevalence rates of ethical misconduct illustrates the need to identify and further investigate specific elements of counselor education training that contribute to these differences.

Historically, the number of internship hours, the more stringent student-to-faculty ratios, and the self-study quality improvement efforts required by CACREP-accredited programs have been reported as key hindrances to pursuing CACREP accreditation (Schmidt, 1999; Vacca, 1992). When assessed empirically, the implementation of these requirements or standards may be found to encourage thoughtful and data-driven curriculum design and evaluation, promote socialization and professional identity development, and increase student's exposure to both routine and complex ethical challenges and clinical experiences while under supervision.

Another possible explanation for differences between graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP-accredited programs are that these differences existed prior to training. In other words, there is an assumption that CACREP-accredited programs tend to attract higher caliber students than non-CACREP-accredited programs; by default, these programs produce higher quality graduates (Provost, 2009). The empirical validity of this assumption is not known. For example, despite Brew's (2001) finding that faculty members perceived an increase in admissions applications after CACREP accreditation was granted, D'Andrea and Liu (2009) reported that students who applied to one CACREP-accredited program displayed a degree of ignorance about CACREP standards that was assumed to be representative of most applicants to CACREP-accredited programs.

Compliance with ethical codes, licensure laws and regulations, and the standards of the profession is an essential trademark of competency (Cottone & Tardyvas, 1998; Garman, Evans, Krause, & Anfoski, 2006). However, when used as a variable for assessing the impact of accreditation standards, it is but one factor worthy of empirical inquiry. A comprehensive program evaluation of the CACREP curriculum standards and their impact on quantifiable performance measures is long overdue.

Strengths

This study is the first known attempt at securing a national sample of archived data related to fully licensed and sanctioned professional counselors and using MFA to assess a model with predictive ability. The key strength of this study lies in the finding that accreditation does in fact make a difference
in the frequency of ethics violations and sanctions. Ethical misconduct as a performance outcome measure is critical because of its established detrimental impact on practitioners, the profession, and public trust.

Limitations
Archived data related to ethics and licensure violations and sanctions are not easily accessible or available in a central database. Although AASCB (2008) has made initial attempts to resolve this challenge through the C-DIN (Counselor Disciplinary Information Network) information database, at the time of this study, the database was largely undeveloped. Therefore, this study was affected by lack of access to demographic data. In particular, the authors originally proposed to include specialty credential and practice setting as hypothetical factors for predicting the frequency of ethical misconduct. Similarly, because there is a lack of available demographic data to describe who these counselors are, readers might not identify with the findings and might perceive the implications as not applicable.

Conclusions
Sexton (2000) stated that “the stakes of clinical training are high” (p. 218). When considering prevalence rates of ethical misconduct, the message is clear: CACREP accreditation makes a difference. However, the counseling profession is dynamic and is becoming increasingly more diverse and specialized (Blase, 2000; Gale & Austin, 2003; Milsom & Akos, 2005). This certainty challenges counselor education programs—regardless of accreditation status—to instill knowledge, skill, and competency in the next generation of counselors. Individual practitioners must also continue developing professionally beyond the structure of their training program and early supervision experiences while maintaining adherence to the professional standards and ethical principles demanded by membership in the profession.

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