

# The Difference Between CACREP and Non-CACREP Scores on Professional Counselor Licensure Examinations

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## Abstract

This study compared a nine-year period of scores from the National Counselor Examination (NCE), the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Examination (NCMHCE), and a state jurisprudence examination (SJE) with graduates (n=1,740) from a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) mental health counseling (MHC) specialization and with graduates (n=200) from a non-CACREP professional counseling specialization. Results from a t-test, Chi-Square, and Levene's test for equality of variances indicated *better performance* from the non-CACREP graduates. Specifically,

- *higher* first attempt pass rates on the NCE, the NCMHCE, and the SJE,
- *higher* scores on the NCE and the SJE, and
- *higher* scores on the Decision Making (DM) subscale of the NCMHCE.

## Problem

Prior research comparing scores of MHC graduates' performance on the NCE, the NCMHCE, and a SJE is non-existent—*especially subjects from a not-for-profit institution compared to subjects from a for-profit institution.*

- Adams' (2006) study *did not* differentiate the CACREP specializations (e.g., school, mental health, marital/couple/family counseling),
- Messina's (1985) study did not measure NCMHCE scores.
- Trusty, Thompson, & Petrocelli's (2004) study *did not* include effect size to measure the power of the relationship between study variables—thus leaving doubts about statistical and practical significance of study results.
- Hollis' (1998) study between CACREP and CACREP programs investigated enrollees and graduates, admission requirements, graduation requirements, and required clinical experience; but it *did not* examine graduate scores on Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) examinations.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide information on the following:

- Pass rates and scores on three licensure examinations.
- Score difference between NCMHCE Information Gathering (IG) & Decision Making (DM) subscales.
- Score difference between *not-for-profit* and *for-profit* institution graduates.

## Relevant Literature

During a CACREP consultation meeting at an accredited university, Hinkle (2008) attested to CACREP's "robust education and training" and outcome of producing "superior students who become qualified professional counselors. CACREP accreditation is a benchmark to be proud of in that it represents the best in graduate counselor education" (p. 7).

Adams (2006) found in an internal replication study that CACREP graduates score higher on the National Counselor Examination (NCE) compared to non-CACREP graduates.

Other researchers have found that program coordinators perceive that CACREP improves the quality of counselor education applicants (Brew, 2001), CACREP graduates have higher levels of counseling skills (McDuff, 2001), and CACREP university's graduate on average more students than non-CACREP universities (Hollis, 1998).

## Research Questions

Do graduates from a CACREP mental health counseling specialization obtain significantly higher scores on Professional Counselor licensure examinations as compared to graduates from a non-CACREP mental health counseling specialization?

*Hypothesis 1:* graduates from a CACREP mental health counseling specialization will have significantly higher first attempt pass rates on the NCE, the NCMHCE, and the SJE compared to graduates from a non-CACREP professional counseling specialization.

*Hypothesis 2:* graduates from a CACREP mental health counseling specialization will have significantly higher scores on the NCE compared to graduates from a non-CACREP professional counseling specialization.

*Hypothesis 3:* graduates from a CACREP mental health counseling specialization will have significantly higher scores on the NCMHCE compared to graduates from a non-CACREP professional counseling specialization.

*Hypothesis 4:* graduates from a CACREP mental health counseling specialization will have significantly higher scores on the SJE compared to graduates from a non-CACREP professional counseling specialization.

## Procedures

I contacted a state government licensing division to obtain raw scores of the NCE, the NCMHCE, and the SJE from postmaster's graduates of the CACREP and non-CACREP universities between March 2001 (date of first recognized licensure in the state) to March 2010 (date of data collection). I removed scores of zero from testing candidates who registered for the examination but did not appear upon testing administration scrubbed the data set. I also deleted a minimal number of test scores prior to March 2001 and after March 2010. This left the sample size from the CACREP university 1,740 and from the non-CACREP university 200.

## Data Analysis

Three sets of data analysis were conducted:

1. Complete analysis procedure consisted of a t-test (.05 level), Chi-Square, and Levene's test for equality of variances of the combined data set.
2. To equalize the sample size between the programs, an exact replication random analysis procedure to increase internal validity consisted of a t-test and Chi-Square test of the data set of pass/fail scores and the NCMHCE scores.
3. Cohen's *d* for effect size was calculated to measure statistical power from the NCE, the SJE, and the Information Gathering (IG) and Decision Making (DM) scales on the NCMHCE.

## Findings

*H1 Rejected:* The CACREP graduates had a combined first attempt pass/fail rate for the NCE, NCMHCE, and the SJE of 1,547 (88.9%) and 189 (10.9%) respectively. The non-CACREP graduates had a combined first attempt pass/fail rate for the NCE, the NCMHCE, and the SJE of 191 (96%) and nine (4.5%) respectively.

*H2 Rejected:* For the NCE complete analysis, the CACREP graduates (n=512) had a mean score of 104.14 and the non-CACREP graduates (n=60) had a mean score of 116.97.

*H3 Rejected:* An independent samples test assuming equal variances produced a t-score of -3.27 (df=285; p=.001) confirming higher scores from the non-CACREP graduates.

*H4 Rejected:* For the SJE, the CACREP graduates (n=562) had a mean score of 84.59 and the non-CACREP graduates (n=65) had a mean score of 89

## Limitations

Lack of access to testing candidate demographics, differences between practitioner-faculty and scientist-practitioner teaching styles (Michel, Cater, & Varela, 2009), and various faculty development initiatives (Lightner & Benander, 2010). Additional threats to internal validity included time since graduating with a bachelor's degree and entering the counselor education program, admission requirements (GRE versus no GRE), timeframe (one to three years) between entry-level graduation and examination completion, and testing candidate preparation.

## Conclusions

Study outcomes may allude to higher levels of cognitive complexity, self-efficacy, information differentiation and integration, and strategic decision performance (Granello, 2010; Iederan, Curşeu, & Vermeulen, 2009; Olivera, 2010) from the non-CACREP graduates.

Caution should be used interpreting these results as the data does not indicate CACREP graduates possess less knowledge or skills compared to CACREP graduates, or that CACREP is not influential in counselor competency or development.

## Social Change Implications

Counselor educators may produce additional studies that result in the following positive outcomes:

- How CACREP promotes institutional engagement theory (Haworth & Conrad; 1997; Peer, 2007; Warden, 2009) or cognitive complexity that influence counseling student interdisciplinary and multicultural development,
- How organizational and institutional factors influence in what way CACREP graduates and non-CACREP graduates prepare for, and take, LPC examinations.,
- How pedagogical modalities differ, such as complete face-to-face student learning outcomes and complete online course delivery student learning outcomes (Sussman & Dutter, 2010).