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A Content Analysis of Doctoral-Level Counselor Education Remediation Policies

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Cover Page Footnote

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Abstract

A qualitative content analysis (QCA) of handbooks ($N = 54$) from CACREP-accredited doctoral counselor education and supervision programs was conducted. The purpose of this study was to better understand how counselor education programs communicate remediation policies and procedures and what specific elements are included in handbooks. The findings revealed that while dismissal policies, dispositions, due process, and evaluation procedures were commonly included, there was significant variability in the inclusion of other domains, such as retention policies and definitions of remediation. Notably, only one handbook included all 10 documented domains. The study highlights a need for more comprehensive and standardized remediation policies to align with updated CACREP standards. Implications for counselor education programs include the importance of clear delineation of student expectations, the inclusion of both formal and subjective evaluation procedures, and the potential benefits of defining the purpose of remediation to support student development and program consistency.

Significance to the Public

This content analysis of remediation policies and procedures in doctoral-level counseling program handbooks provides insights into how institutions support student success. Understanding these findings is crucial for educators, administrators, and counselors alike, as they work collaboratively to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of remediation processes in higher education.

Keywords: Counselor education, counselor education and supervision, remediation, gatekeeping, remediation policy and procedure

Remediation for counselors in training who are exhibiting problems of professional comportment (PPC) is mandated by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2024 Standards (2023) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014). While recent studies have aimed to better understand how counselor educators approach remediation (DeCino et al., 2020; DeCino et al., 2022; Harrichand et al., 2022; McKnight et al., 2023; Salpietro et al., 2021; Salpietro et al., 2022) and doctoral students' experiences with remediation (Corley et al., 2020; Freeman et al.,

2020), limited research exists on how policies and procedures are communicated to students.

Guidance on what should be included in counselor education programs' remediation policies and procedures is scant, which is especially concerning, as ill-established or informal policies are a known barrier to remediation (Corley et al., 2020; Homrich & Henderson, 2018; Salpietro et al., 2022). The CACREP 2016 Standards (2015) indicate that programs must adhere to a policy for student retention, remediation, and dismissal and include these policies in their student handbooks. CACREP requires programs to create policies in

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accordance with institutional due process, professional ethical codes, and standards of practice (Standard 1.N.–O.). However, CACREP does not offer definitions for remediation or retention, nor do the 2016 Standards explicate what these policies should include. The CACREP 2024 Standards have no significant changes in standard 1.N. (now 1.O., the standard requiring retention, remediation, and dismissal policies), so counselor educators can expect no further clarification on what constitutes adequate remediation policy. However, it is important to note that the CACREP 2024 Standards do include that retention, remediation, and dismissal policies be written, a specification not present in the 2016 Standards. The 2016 and 2024 Standards encourage programs to consider institutional due process policies and the professional ethical codes, but the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) offers little clarification. According to the Code of Ethics, programs must provide students with bases for evaluation, assistance in obtaining remediation, and options for recourse or appeal. Programs must also obtain “professional consultation” on and document all remediation and dismissal decisions (ACA, 2014, p. 15). The lack of clarification from accrediting and professional bodies presents the potential for significant variation in how remediation is conducted in counselor education programs, and therefore, the content programs include in student handbooks.

Remediation policies and procedures in CACREP-accredited counseling programs have been examined before, but the findings are more than 10 years old and may not reflect the recent trends in the profession, as they were published when the CACREP 2009 Standards (2008) were active. Bryant et al. (2013) reviewed 251 CACREP-accredited master’s program websites for available data on admission requirements and evaluation and remediation procedures. They found that 56.4% of program handbooks included student evaluation procedures. Bryant et al. (2013) found that about half of the handbooks (50.2%) mentioned remediation in their policies, 35% had specific procedures delineated, and 12.8% mentioned a remediation procedure exists, but they did not

include detailed information on the process. About 40% included dismissal policies and 25.3% indicated a student’s right to appeal, despite these aspects being required components of the policies, according to the CACREP 2009 Standards that were utilized at the time. Brown (2013) reviewed 47 doctoral program handbooks for how they defined and assessed problematic behavior, and the process and procedures to remediate problematic behavior. They found that 28% of the program handbooks did not include remediation procedures. Findings indicated that many of the handbooks (72%) followed a staged process of remediation and included consequences for not completing remediation (70%). Surprisingly, Brown (2013) found that only 6% of the handbooks had policies related to nonacademic performance expectations (e.g., self-care, interpersonal interactions, counseling skills) within their policies on problematic behavior.

Thus, comparing and contrasting the findings from Bryant et al. (2013) and Brown (2013), it is evident that while master’s programs had a higher inclusion rate of evaluation and remediation procedures, there was still significant variability in the specificity and comprehensiveness of these policies. Brown (2013) highlighted similar variability in doctoral programs, with an even more pronounced lack of detailed policies on nonacademic performance expectations. This comparison underscores the dearth of comprehensive and standardized remediation policies at both the master’s and doctoral levels. The limited focus on nonacademic performance expectations at the doctoral level is particularly concerning given the more complex roles and responsibilities of doctoral students. These findings highlight a critical gap in the literature and the need for updated research on current remediation policies and procedures in counselor education programs.

The CACREP 2016 and 2024 Standards do not differentiate between doctoral-level and master’s-level policies and procedures; programs can have the same remediation and policy and procedures for doctoral students as they do for master’s-level students. This may be problematic, as the PPCs

addressed with doctoral students could differ from master's-level students, since doctoral programs focus on teaching, supervision, research and scholarship, leadership, and advocacy, in addition to counseling practice (CACREP 2015, 2023), and they have more arduous program requirements (e.g., comprehensive examinations, supervision of master's students, dissertation). Currently, little is known about the remediation of doctoral students. Most extant literature focuses on the experiences of doctoral students as gatekeepers (Corley et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020) and highlights the importance of adequately preparing doctoral students to engage in remediation (DeCino et al., 2020; DeCino et al., 2022; Harrichand et al., 2022), not the remediation of doctoral students. In one of the few studies on doctoral remediation, DeCino and colleagues (2023) explored counselor educators' experiences gatekeeping doctoral students during dissertation. They suggest that counselor educators may "lack clearly defined and comprehensive gatekeeping protocols, policies, or resources for students" (p. 11) due to the participants' lack of formal interventions and their desire for more standardized policies and procedures. In a dissertation completed by Krinke (2021), five counselor educators were asked about their experience gatekeeping doctoral students. Their findings suggest that there are similarities and differences compared to gatekeeping master's-level students, with participants reporting that they gatekeep doctoral students less often due to the more stringent admission requirements, closer relationships between faculty and doctoral students that allow for earlier intervention, and implicit assumptions that doctoral students can receive and integrate feedback and are more competent due to their completion of a master's-level program. Participants in this study reported that remediation at the doctoral level is more complicated due to doctoral students' integration into various programmatic systems (e.g., teaching courses, supervising), unclear professional dispositions for doctoral students, and their desire to avoid a negative emotional impact on students (Krinke, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

Counselor education has no standardized method, policy, or procedure for remediation, which leads to significant variations in program policies and procedures (Brown, 2013; Bryant et al., 2013; Salpietro et al., 2022). The CACREP 2016 and 2024 Standards require that counselor educators clearly document policies related to remediation and use data in a systematic process of evaluation, but do not clearly state the type or scope of policy and procedure required. Despite this requirement, studies have found that some or all policies are missing (Brown, 2013; Bryant et al., 2013). This presents the potential for significant variation in how remediation is conducted in counselor education programs, and the content programs included in student handbooks.

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis (QCA) was to examine the existing policies and procedures documented in CACREP-accredited doctoral program handbooks. Focusing on doctoral programs builds upon recent research and addresses the unique demands and higher rigor of these programs. While recent studies highlight the preparation of doctoral students as gatekeepers, there is limited research on their remediation processes (Corley et al., 2020; DeCino et al., 2020; DeCino et al., 2022; Freeman et al., 2020; Harrichand et al., 2022). DeCino et al. (2023) noted a lack of defined protocols for doctoral students, underscoring the need for standardization.

By utilizing content analysis methods, this study aims to extend and enhance our understanding by systematically identifying and categorizing the specific elements of remediation policies and procedures across different programs. Content analysis allows for a detailed examination of the language and structure of handbook policies, providing insights into commonalities and discrepancies that may not be apparent through other research methods. This approach will help uncover patterns and themes that can inform the development of more standardized and comprehensive guidelines for remediation in

counselor education. Our research question was: *How are remediation policies and procedures documented in doctoral-level counselor education student handbooks?* We aimed to understand how doctoral programs define the purpose of remediation, the terminology used, and the scope of information related to remediation included in handbooks (e.g., due process, methods of evaluation).

Method

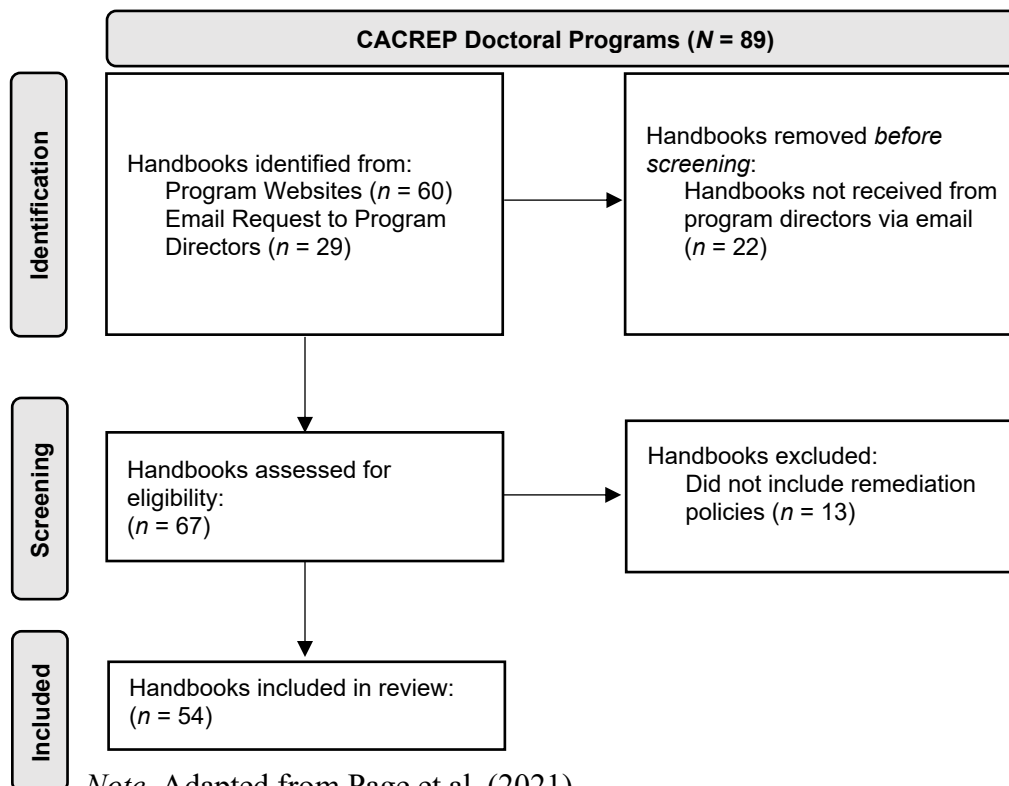
Sample

Via an export from CACREP's publicly available data on their website, the names of 89 CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision were identified (see Figure 1). We followed procedures outlined by the PRISMA 2020 Statement for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021)

to organize the corpus (handbooks). The third author then visited each program's website to obtain a copy of the student handbooks. Student handbooks were collected in the spring of 2022 and analyzed in the summer of 2022. Of the 89 programs identified, 60 (67.4%) programs had handbooks available on their website. Programs that did not have their handbooks online ($n = 29$; 32.5%) were then emailed to request a copy. We were able to obtain an additional seven program handbooks via email ($n = 67$; 75% of handbooks collected). We were unable to obtain the remaining 22 handbooks because programs did not respond to our email ($n = 17$), declined to provide it ($n = 3$), or no longer had an active program ($n = 2$). In total, we were able to obtain and review 67 handbooks. Upon initial screening of the corpus, 13 did not include any remediation policies and were excluded from further analysis, as they did not meet inclusion criteria. We analyzed 54 handbooks (81%) that did include remediation policies.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flowchart



The Coding Frame

Researchers used QCA (Schreier, 2012) to review the 54 CACREP-accredited doctoral program handbooks. Before coding began, we created an *a priori* coding frame, congruent with Schreier's (2012) QCA method, using existing remediation literature that identified key components of a remediation policy and procedure (Brown, 2013; Bryant et al., 2013; Salpietro et al., 2022; see Table 1). The first and second authors engaged in the creation of the coding frame. Our coding frame included 10 different domains to evaluate the corpus: (a) definition of remediation, (b) subjective evaluation, (c) statement on retention, (d) remediation interventions, (e) responsibility to remediate/gatekeep, (f) purpose, (g) evaluation procedures, (h) due process/appeals, (i) dispositions, and (j) dismissal policy. The coding frame was hosted in Qualtrics and the 10 domains were *select all that apply* items with the option for write-in items and comments, congruent with QCA procedures (Schreier, 2012). We also included the Association for Counselor Education (ACES) region to describe the sample (e.g., NCACES, NARACES, RMACES, SACES, WACES), which was a *forced-choice multiple-choice* item in the Qualtrics coding frame. The definition of each domain and method of measurement is described in Table 1. In addition to the variables described in the table, we noticed through our coding that some programs included remediation plans. We did not include that in our coding frame but did compile those data post hoc.

Data Analysis & Procedure

We piloted the coding frame on 8 handbooks (12% of the corpus, congruent with QCA [Schreier, 2012]) using a Qualtrics version of the coding frame to assist with data management. Each handbook was coded twice, by the first and second authors (triangulation of researchers). Coding was completed by reading the handbook using a PDF reader and the search function for our domains identified earlier (e.g., "remediation," "dispositions," "due process," etc.) in addition to

reading the handbooks. Once individual coding was completed, the first author compiled the codes into an Excel spreadsheet to identify discrepancies and to prepare for consensus. Following the initial pilot coding, we met as a research team for consensus coding. The coding frame and pilot met the standards for rigor via strong interrater reliability (>90%). We proceeded to code the rest of the handbooks using the same procedure via four additional rounds of coding (individual coding, compilation of codes via Excel, and consensus coding meetings). The researchers met across four research team meetings to consensus code data. Interrater reliability was greater than 90%, supporting the reliability of our findings. Following the completion of data analysis, the researchers compiled the findings, which are presented next.

Trustworthiness

The first and second authors were involved in the creation of the codebook, data analysis, and data management, and the third author provided support by locating handbooks for the corpus and manuscript construction (i.e., literature review). The first two authors are counselor educators who have experience conducting content analyses and multiple experiences with remediations as faculty members. The third author is a graduate student in clinical mental health counseling who assisted with collecting the sample and manuscript construction. We identified and discussed our biases and expectations before and throughout the coding process at multiple points, especially before and after our consensus coding meetings. Memos were written immediately following each round of individual coding. Our knowledge and biases regarding doctoral remediation were influenced by previous research we have conducted on remediation, and our own experiences as counselor educators and remediators. We expected that most programs may be significantly lacking in their remediation policy and procedure, due to inconsistencies in applications of remediations we see in the field. We assumed that programs would include at least the minimum mandated by the CACREP 2016 Standards (2015) and the ACA

Table 1

Coding Frame Domain Definitions

Domain	Definition
Definition of Remediation	A clear definition of what remediation is (e.g., a process in which X, Y, Z)
Subjective Evaluation	A statement or implication that students could be assessed on subjective methods (e.g., interactions with faculty or other students)
Statement on Retention	Policy of retention that clearly stated what students must do to remain in the program (e.g., minimum GPA, no more than three Cs)
Remediation Interventions	Two or more interventions that could be used to remediate students (e.g., increased supervision, repeat a course)
Responsibility to Remediate/Gatekeep	Clear statement on their responsibility to remediate/gatekeep, above and beyond a statement on ethical responsibility/citation of ACA Code of Ethics (2014)
Purpose	Clear statement on the function of remediation (e.g., to help student increase competency in ...)
Evaluation Procedures	Indication that students will be evaluated and description of what the evaluation procedures would entail
Due Process/Appeals	Internal and external processes of due process are clearly delineated, not just referenced
Dispositions	Two or more nonacademic dispositions that were expected of students or could initiate remedial intervention
Dismissal Policy	Communicated as not only a possibility, but under what circumstances and how dismissal occurs

Code of Ethics (2014). We worked to mitigate the effects of our biases and expectations through thick description of the research process, memo writing, team discussion, and triangulation of researchers.

 Findings

Of the 67 handbooks included in the corpus, we found that 13 handbooks did not include any information regarding remediation procedures at all after initial screening, yielding 54 handbooks included in the findings presented next. A summary of findings can be found in Table 2. Most of the programs were in the SACES region ($n = 29$, 54%) followed by NCACES ($n = 13$, 24%), RMACES

($n = 6$, 11%), NARACES ($n = 4$, 7%), and WACES ($n = 2$, 3.5%).

Post Hoc Analysis: Included Remediation Plans

Following our initial analysis, we noticed that some handbooks ($n = 11$, 20.4%) included blank or mock remediation plans within their program handbooks. In some cases, sample remediation plans helped handbooks meet the criteria outlined previously, and in other cases, they were simply included to inform students of the structure of the form.

Overview of Included Domains

As outlined in Table 2, the handbooks we analyzed included disparate amounts of domains. The handbooks in the present sample on average included 6 domains of the 10 that we documented ($SD = 3.94$). Only one handbook included all 10 domains. Among the 54 handbooks subjected to review, 46 (85.18%) were exclusively doctoral program handbooks, whereas 8 (14.81%) were combined doctoral-level and master's-level program handbooks. All eight handbooks with combined doctoral-level and master's-level policies used the same remediation policies and procedures, evaluation procedures, and dispositional criteria and assessment forms for both programs. There were separate program objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) for doctoral-level students and master's-level students, aligned with accreditation standards.

Dismissal policies were the most common, included in 83% of programs ($n = 45$); dispositions ($n = 43$, 80%) was the second most included domain; and due process and evaluation procedures were tied for the third most common ($n = 39$, 72%). For dispositions, program handbooks included either one or both of the following: (a) expected dispositions (e.g., interpersonal skills, personal characteristics, cultural competence); and (b) dispositions that could initiate remediation (e.g., lack of awareness, consistent tardiness, unwillingness to receive feedback). Most commonly, programs indicated that they completed evaluations of students on a semesterly or yearly basis, with some programs using a standardized measure (e.g., the Professional Dispositions Performance Evaluation [PDPE]) or an assessment that they created themselves. Many programs did not provide or reference a formal evaluation measure or indicate how often students are evaluated.

Domains that were found intermittently in the corpus include the purpose of remediation ($n = 25$, 46%), statement on responsibility to remediate/gatekeep ($n = 23$, 43%), and sample remediation interventions ($n = 16$, 30%). The

purpose of remediation was often portrayed as a way to “support” student “success,” “growth,” and “professional development.” Other times, the purpose of remediation was to “address deficiencies” or “weaknesses.” In addressing responsibility to remediate/gatekeep, many handbooks included a reference to professional standards of practice, including the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and the CACREP 2016 Standards (2015). The most included remediation interventions in program handbooks were referrals for personal counseling, retaking courses, leaves of absence, repeating or extending clinical experiences like practicum and internship, and assigning additional coursework in classes.

The least common domains found in program handbooks were statement on retention ($n = 15$, 28%), subjective evaluation ($n = 12$, 22%), and definition of remediation ($n = 2$, 3.5%). To communicate that subjective evaluation may be used, many program handbooks used language like “the professional judgement of a faculty member” or “observational assessment.”



Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how counselor education doctoral programs are communicating their remediation policies and procedures, as well as what specific elements are included with program handbooks. Of the original 67 included in the sample, 13 handbooks (19%) did not have distinct remediation policies or procedures. Of the 54 handbooks that did include policies, only 1 included all 10 domains and, on average, handbooks included 6 domains. Eight of the 54 handbooks had combined remediation policies and procedures for both doctoral-level and master's-level students, including evaluation methods and dispositional expectations. Many of the programs we reviewed may also use the same policies, procedures, and dispositions for multiple programs; however, this assumption remains uncertain as we did not collect nor compare the master's-level program handbooks.

Table 2*Domains Identified in Handbooks*

Domain	Handbooks Including	Handbooks Not Including	Percent of Corpus
Definition of Remediation	2	52	3.5%
Subjective Evaluation	12	42	22%
Statement on Retention	15	39	28%
Remediation Interventions	16	38	30%
Responsibility to Remediate/Gatekeep	23	31	43%
Purpose of Remediation	25	27	46%
Evaluation Procedures	39	15	72%
Due Process/Appeals	39	15	72%
Dispositions	43	11	80%
Dismissal Policy	45	9	83%

Note. Number of handbooks analyzed = 54

Most frequently included were dismissal policies, dispositions, due process, and evaluation procedures. The CACREP 2016 Standards mandate that the aforementioned (aside from dispositions and evaluation procedures) be included in handbooks, and while these were the most identified domains, findings of this study indicate that 17% to 28% of programs sampled are not in compliance with one or more of the requirements of the 2016 Standards. However, the newest iteration of the standards, the CACREP 2024 Standards, requires programs to include individual student assessment procedures and professional dispositions in student handbooks (1.M.5), a significant step toward creating more comprehensive standards in remediation policy and procedure. The only other policy required to be in program handbooks per the 2016 Standards is a retention policy, which was one of the least included (28%) among the present sample. We operationalized retention as what a student must do to remain in a program (e.g., maintain a certain GPA). However, different definitions of retention exist and may vary based on a university's strategic plan. For example, what is done to retain students (e.g., types of support available) could be considered retention. Another

reason this domain may be so infrequent is that programs may address retention in their handbooks, but not explicitly state it as a policy.

More programs included dismissal policies in the current study (83%) compared to previous analyses (40% found by Bryant et al., 2013). Brown (2013) found that 70% of doctoral handbooks included consequences for not completing remediation, but they did not specify if policies specifically alluded to dismissal. Similar to dismissal policies, we found that more programs included due process policies (72%) compared to previous studies (25.5% in Bryant et al., 2013). Brown (2013) mentioned that “many policies” included appeal processes, but again, did not further specify (p. 186). How we defined due process may account for the finding in our study that 28% of handbooks did not include due process. When searching for due process policies in handbooks, we looked for both internal and external policies that are clearly referenced in the handbook, not just alluded to. For example, a program that indicated how due process is initiated within the program and external to the program (i.e., university-level due process) and clearly delineated dismissal processes were counted as

including due process policies. Programs that were missing internal or external policies or programs that mentioned that a due process policy exists, but did not elaborate on what the policy entails, were not counted. Nevertheless, we found the insufficient and missing dismissal and due process policies notable, as these were the crux of the *Ward v. Wilbanks* (2009) case (Dugger & Francis, 2014).

While dispositions are not explicitly required to be in handbooks per the CACREP 2016 Standards, expectations of students and matriculation requirements are, and we argue that professional dispositions, academic and nonacademic, encompass the expectations of students. Dugger and Francis (2014) similarly suggest that expectations include behavior and performance. CACREP seems to agree, as the new 2024 Standards (2023) do require programs to include “individual student assessment procedures, including ... professional dispositions” (Standard 1.M.5). However, the wording of this requirement could be interpreted as just requiring information on how professional dispositions are assessed, not necessarily what they are. Our findings align with Christensen et al. (2018) who analyzed 224 master’s-level counselor education program handbooks and found that 21% of their sample did not include dispositions or competencies expected of students. In our analysis, our definition of dispositions was more inclusive. We included both dispositions expected of students or dispositions that could initiate remedial intervention; Christensen et al. (2018) only included expected dispositions. They argued that “a lack of adverse behaviors does not provide evidence of demonstrating the dispositions expected of students” (p. 9), and we are inclined to agree. Therefore, the number of handbooks that have expected dispositions versus those that could initiate remediation could vary from our findings. Counselor educators have advocated for the adoption of personal and professional standards of conduct by CACREP and have proposed lists of professional and interpersonal behaviors (e.g., Homrich et al., 2014), but, as noted earlier, CACREP did not expand on professional dispositions in the new 2024 Standards.

The 2016 Standards and the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) require programs to have a plan for student assessment/evaluation but do not require programs to delineate procedures in their handbooks. Almost three-quarters (72%) of program handbooks in this sample included specific evaluation procedures, sometimes including formalized evaluation measures (e.g., Assessment of Professional Counseling Dispositions [APCD], Mullen et al., 2024). This is an increase from previous findings (56.4% in Bryant et al., 2013), indicating that counselor educators may see the benefit of communicating evaluation procedures in program handbooks. The 2024 Standards now require programs to include student evaluation procedures in their handbooks, requiring programs to be more transparent about their procedures, key performance indicators (KPIs), and professional dispositions. We also found that 22% of the handbooks sampled included a reference to subjective evaluation, wherein they informed students that in addition to being formally evaluated, students will also be observed informally (e.g., observation of communication and behaviors) and that informal evaluations can initiate remediation. The mention of subjective evaluation addresses a discrepancy that we noticed within remediation policies regarding when remediation is initiated. Many policies clearly indicated that remediation could be initiated based on their performance on formal evaluations; however, this phrasing could be interpreted to mean that remediation may *only* be initiated through formal evaluations. This interpretation leaves little opportunity for remediation to be initiated without the supporting documentation, in this case, a formal evaluation, which may only occur at certain points within a student’s tenure (e.g., at the end of a semester or school year) and may not capture all dispositions and behaviors (Mullen et al., 2024). This can be problematic, as evidence has shown that signs of “impairment” are often identified, and subsequently remediated, based on interactions with students (Crawford & Gilroy, 2012, p. 33).

We found that the purpose of remediation was only present intermittently in the handbooks sampled (46%) and the definition of remediation was the least included of all the domains at 3%. One

reason the definition of remediation may be so infrequent could be the overlap with the purpose of remediation, as small changes in wording such as “our intention” or “the goal of” could be the difference between stating the purpose of remediation or defining it. Remediation is often perceived as a punitive process, despite documentation of its success (Crawford & Gilroy, 2012; Salpietro et al., 2022). Clarifying the purpose of remediation and/or defining it offers the opportunity to frame remediation as a process for support and growth and demystify the notion that remediation is punitive. There is also evidence to suggest that discussing the definition and purpose of remediation allows faculty to learn more about their own approach to remediation and more collaboratively assess and remediate students, which has been identified as helpful in remediation processes (Salpietro et al., 2022). We found that many programs (43%) included a statement on their responsibility to gatekeep and remediate students, often citing the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which could be included in statements on the purpose of remediation.

Of the sampled handbooks, 30% included two or more remedial interventions. Interventions could be considered one of the most subjective aspects of the remediation process, as there are no studies on the effectiveness of different interventions. Faculty must rely on their professional judgment while maintaining consistency in their own decision-making, such that a professor does not remediate one student in a substantially different way from other students in similar situations (Homrich, 2009). Salpietro et al. (2021) explored how counselor educators approach remediation by examining the interventions they would be most and least likely to implement when presented with a case study about a student who was struggling with receptivity to feedback. They found that the counselor educators sampled approached the same scenario in four different ways, further supporting a lack of consensus on what interventions should be used for different remedial concerns. Scholars have suggested that programs keep an “intervention bank” that includes interventions that have the potential to be successful for different concerns or

those that have been successful (Vacha-Haase et al., 2004, p. 119), therein providing faculty with options and establishing some consistency in the interventions used. It is possible that the programs sampled do have an “intervention bank” that is not listed in their handbook.

Additional external factors may also influence the development and implementation of remediation policies. University-wide policies and the sociopolitical climate of the university’s state could impact how remediation processes are structured and communicated. For instance, institutional policies on student conduct and academic standards, as well as state regulations and broader sociopolitical trends, might shape the specifics of remediation procedures and expectations. These external factors could contribute to the variability observed in remediation policies and highlight the need for CACREP and other professional bodies to advocate for clearer and more specific language in accreditation standards. Addressing these external influences could support the creation of more uniform and effective remediation practices across programs.

Implications for Counselor Educators

This study has implications for the development and inclusion of remediation policies and procedures in the program handbooks as well as considerations for governing bodies.

Clear Identification of Student Expectations, Dispositions, and Evaluation

Related to remediation, the CACREP 2024 Standards (2023) require program handbooks to include the following information: expectations of students; assessment procedures related to professional dispositions; policies on retention, remediation, and dismissal; and due process. Based on the findings of this study, we encourage collaboration among faculty to identify student expectations and dispositions and to clearly delineate them in program handbooks, perhaps

including both expected dispositions and those that could initiate remediation. For doctoral programs, expectations and dispositions should reflect the advanced roles and responsibilities that doctoral students are expected to fulfill. For example, expectations could include demonstrating leadership in academic and professional settings, conducting independent research, and managing complex clinical cases. Dispositions should address advanced competencies such as critical thinking, resilience under high stress, and the ability to integrate feedback across diverse professional roles. Faculty could review proposed dispositions (e.g., Homrich et al., 2014) and establish evaluation tools (e.g., PDCA) for guidance. Specific notation that expectations and dispositions are not exhaustive could be protective in cases where students may need remediation but may not be in violation of a specific disposition. We observed a discrepancy in the initiation of remediation, typically occurring solely in response to formal evaluations, leaving little room for remediation to be initiated at other points in a student's tenure. Therefore, in addition to outlining formal evaluations that can initiate remediation, counselor educators are encouraged to clarify that formal evaluations are not the only catalyst for intervention. This could be simplified by just adding a statement in the handbook that formal evaluation can commence outside of standard evaluation periods, or faculty could create their own statement on subjectivity in counselor education. We encourage programs to consult with their university's compliance and legal offices.

Remediation Culture and Interventions

Above and beyond CACREP requirements, there are elements programs could include to help shift the culture around how remediation is perceived by students. Programs could consider clearly defining remediation and its purpose as an opportunity to communicate the faculty's approach to remediation and how remediation is a tool to assist students and protect clients, not penalize them (Salpietro et al., 2022). For doctoral students, remediation definitions should emphasize the developmental

nature of their training and the importance of support for their complex roles, including research and teaching responsibilities. This could involve framing remediation as a collaborative process aimed at facilitating growth and addressing the advanced challenges specific to doctoral study. Compiling a list of potential interventions can help students be less suspicious of the remediation process, as they are more aware of what remediation may look like. Since selecting remediation is not evidence-based and instead based on the judgment of the faculty, having a documented list of potential interventions could also provide protection if remedial decisions are challenged or appealed. It could also support new faculty in conducting remediations. Comprehensive lists of remediation interventions can be found in the literature (e.g., Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; Salpietro et al., 2021). Further, some outlined programmatic interventions can promote consistency in remedial interventions chosen by program faculty. Including interventions could also be preventative. Students may need additional support but have not yet reached the threshold for remediation; knowing what kinds of additional support the program faculty can offer may encourage students to request additional support before the remedial threshold is reached.

Separate Remediation Policies and Procedures for Doctoral Students

Eight of the 54 handbooks combined remediation policies and procedures for both doctoral-level and master's-level students. While singular policies and procedures are not inherently problematic, as consistent remediation policies and procedures across programs may be beneficial, identical evaluation procedures and dispositional expectations for both program levels are concerning, given the distinct nature of doctoral programs. Doctoral students in counselor education must manage multiple roles and relationships, while still focusing on their personal and professional growth (Farrell et al., 2023). They must not only maintain their identity as a professional counselor, but also develop their professional identity, which

often includes separate components like a researcher identity (Limberg et al., 2013; Limberg et al., 2020). In addition to counseling competencies, doctoral students must achieve competencies in the areas of supervision, teaching, research and scholarship, and leadership and advocacy, all of which have unique behavioral, emotional, and ethical components. In a comprehensive review of research on doctoral students from multiple disciplines, researchers found that doctoral students experience very high stress levels, mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety), and struggle to balance their personal and professional lives, resulting in negative emotions that negatively impact their motivation and goal attainment (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Research we do have on doctoral remediation suggests a lack of consistent remediation policies and procedures and emphasizes the need for dispositions that are operationalized and tailored to the unique tasks of doctoral study (DeCino et al., 2023; Krinke, 2021). To address these unique needs, doctoral programs should develop remediation policies and procedures that specifically address the complexities of doctoral training. This could include defining remediation processes tailored to advanced academic work, such as research activities, teaching responsibilities, and clinical supervision roles. Given that doctoral students navigate multiple roles, it is essential for remediation policies to incorporate input from various stakeholders, including faculty members, research advisors, clinical supervisors, and academic advisors. This collaborative approach ensures that policies are comprehensive and reflective of the diverse challenges faced by doctoral students. Policies should recognize the distinctive stressors faced by doctoral students and provide specific strategies for managing these challenges. For instance, remediation plans could incorporate support for balancing research and teaching duties, guidance for managing the demands of academic publishing, and strategies for handling the pressures of leadership roles in professional settings. Given the unique demands and challenges faced by doctoral students, it is essential to develop distinct remediation policies

and procedures for doctoral-level and master's-level programs to address their specific needs and ensure effective support and evaluation.

We also encourage CACREP, and other professional counseling bodies, to develop best practices in remediation to better guide counselor educators. Consensus on professional dispositions and expectations of counseling students could provide more continuity between programs and decrease the burden of subjectivity on counselor educators. They could also provide clarification on the terminology used in the standards such as “expectations of students” (1.M.3), “retention,” and even “remediation” (1.M.7). CACREP has provided Guiding Statements on standards in the past, including on Standard 1.O. (remediation policy and procedure); however, the statements are brief and only reference ethical violations, not other commonly identified student concerns (e.g., receptivity to feedback; CACREP, 2023). We understand the value of accrediting standards that allow for flexibility in implementation, but standardization could offer more continuity for both students and faculty.

Limitations

This study has limitations to consider. How we operationalized each domain may have impacted the findings (e.g., the overlap between purpose and definition; expected dispositions and those that initiate remediation). We only examined program handbooks, but policies could exist in other areas, such as program websites. Programs could rely on university-wide policies for doctoral remediation rather than those at the program or department levels, potentially excluding some remediation language relevant to the study. Program characteristics, like delivery modality and funding opportunities for students, were not collected and could impact policy and procedure. For example, there are unique challenges to assessing professional and personal development in virtual environments, and therefore, how PPCs are identified and remediated may differ from face-to-face modalities (Grunhaus & Lyons, 2024).

Future Research Directions

Future research could explore master's-level program handbooks, as there are significantly more CACREP-accredited master's programs than doctoral programs, and findings may differ. Studies could also more closely analyze remediation procedures, including the specific steps taken and persons involved. Future studies could also collect specific program information, such as delivery modality (i.e., in-person, remote) or enrollment status (i.e., part-time, full-time) and identify any differences or similarities in remediation policies and procedures. It would also be worthwhile to examine how counseling students perceive and understand the process of remediation, which could guide how policy is created and communicated. Finally, outcomes-based studies exploring the efficacy of remedial interventions in counselor education, while difficult to conduct, would be important in establishing which gatekeeping and/or remedial interventions are effective.

Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the significant variability and gaps in the remediation policies and procedures documented in CACREP-accredited doctoral program handbooks. Despite the CACREP 2016 and 2024 Standards requiring detailed documentation, a notable percentage of programs are not in full compliance, particularly concerning the inclusion of essential elements such as due process and evaluation procedures. This variability suggests a need for clearer guidelines and more comprehensive standards to ensure consistency across counselor education programs. The study highlights the importance of clearly defined remediation purposes and procedures, not only for compliance but also to support student growth and success effectively. As the counseling profession continues to evolve, it is crucial for governing bodies like CACREP to develop and disseminate best practices for remediation. This would aid counselor educators in creating transparent, supportive, and effective remediation

processes, ultimately enhancing the quality and consistency of counselor education.

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