

2015

# A Quantitative Examination of the Use of Stand-Alone Courses and Infused Curricula on Middle School Counselors' Perceptions of Preparedness with Legal and Ethical Dilemmas

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A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF STAND-ALONE COURSES AND  
INFUSED CURRICULA ON MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
PREPAREDNESS WITH LEGAL AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Counselor Education

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2015

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Poppa, Mom, Gran Gran, Grandpa Charlie, Daughter, and Husband. To my Poppa, I missed your little tokens of encouragement throughout this journey, but I know you are smiling down on me from Heaven. To my Mom, you've been there for me every step of the way—even when I faced roadblocks—thank you for your unconditional love and support. To my Gran Gran, from a very young age, you've taught me the importance of an education. You've taught me the importance of never giving up and challenging myself. I truly cherish the conversations that we've had throughout this journey. To my Grandpa Charlie, thank you for always believing in me and helping me reach my dreams. I am forever grateful for your unconditional support along the way. To my daughter Ella, I started writing this dissertation when I was induced with you. You are now one year old, and I am beyond blessed for your smiles, giggles, and cuddles throughout this past year—they've kept me going and continue to keep me going in life. To my husband, Raymond, I am forever grateful for your patience, encouragement, humor, and extra help throughout this journey. From watching Ella so I could have weekend-long writing sessions, to making sure I balanced family and school by setting up family dates, to “cooking” for me to make sure I had fuel to write—you are one in a million. Thank you for being there for me every step of the way!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, coworkers, and professors that have provided me with the strength and encouragement to make it through this journey. In particular, I am truly grateful for the guidance and support from my chair, Joshua Gold, for believing in me and being there for me every step of the way. After working all day and night on a chapter or edits, it was always refreshing to see your feedback and kind words in my inbox the following morning. I appreciate your honesty and high expectations through this process. You made sure that no stone was left unturned as I wrote my dissertation, which prepared me for my defense. Thank you for taking the time and effort to help me grow as a counselor, counselor educator, and researcher throughout this journey.

## ABSTRACT

As school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing litigation, it is imperative that they are appropriately trained to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues they may encounter in their daily work. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' self-described preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. Data was collected from middle school counselors in South Carolina by using an electronic survey. The researcher used the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale as the instrument to determine their preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The results of this study may help counselor educators advocate for curriculum changes that best meet the legal and ethical training needs of their graduate students.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCA.....	American School Counselor Association
CACREP.....	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
ELICSES.....	Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
SPSS.....	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 19

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

While the perception of school counseling is that of a profession focused solely on client needs, its practice does entail attention to the domains that have been legally enacted to guide that practice. Law can be defined as, “a body of principles, standards, and rules that govern human behavior by creating obligations as well as rights, and by imposing penalties” (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). School counselors must abide by federal and state laws, as well as state statutes; however these laws and statutes lack practical meaning until judges interpret them in the court of law (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Therefore, the interpretations of laws and statutes influence the legal obligations school counselors owe to their clients (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Moreover, case law in other states can influence a judge’s decision in the counselor’s jurisdiction (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Accordingly, since the legal obligation of school counselors is multifaceted, they are likely to face a number of legal issues.

When school counselors do not fulfill their legal obligations, they may be subject to civil and/or criminal court proceedings (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). If a school counselor violates a criminal law, the government may take action (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). Additionally, depending on the outcome of the case, the school counselor may have to pay a fine or serve time in prison (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). In contrast, a person may bring a civil suit against a school counselor (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). If the

court determines that the school counselor was negligent, the school counselor may have to pay damages to the plaintiff (Remley & Herlihy, 2001).

When clients feel that they have been harmed emotionally and/or physically by a professional, they may file a malpractice lawsuit (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). In order for a malpractice lawsuit to be successful, the client must establish: (1) the school counselor had a duty to the client, (2) the school counselor breached the duty owed to the client, and (3) the client was mentally and/or physically harmed by the professional (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). Moreover, in order for professionals to be found negligent, the court must determine that they did not, “exercise the knowledge, skill, and judgment common to other members in the profession” (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). In today’s litigious society, school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing malpractice lawsuits (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998).

There are a number of ways school counselors can violate criminal and civil laws. For example, if school counselors fail to report suspected child abuse, they may face criminal penalties and civil liability (Lambie, 2005). Additionally, failure to maintain confidentiality has also led to criminal and civil court proceedings for school counselors (Glosoff, 2002). The duty to warn and protect has been an area that school counselors have been found negligent (Isaacs, 1997). Moreover, school counselors have been found liable for not protecting suicidal clients (Capuzzi, 2002). When school counselors respond or fail to respond to a subpoena, they may face civil or criminal issues (Barsky, 2012). Lastly, school counselors may encounter civil and criminal court proceedings if they are found to be incompetent (Boy & Pine, 1968).

In addition to federal and state laws and statutes, school counselors must also abide by standards and competencies set forth by the profession. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has created standards and competencies as a guide for professional school counselors. More specifically, ASCA's competencies, "outline the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes that ensure school counselors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the needs of pre K-12 students" (ASCA, School Counselor Competencies, 2007). These competencies include:

- I-A-7. Knowledge of legal, ethical, and professional issues in pre K-12 schools
- I-B-1g. Demonstrates multicultural, ethical, and professional competencies in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the comprehensive school counseling program
- II-A-7. Knowledge of legal and ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and educational systems, including district and building policies
- II-B-4. Applies the ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and adheres to the legal aspects of the role of the school counselor
- II-B-4a. Practices ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for school counselors
- II-B-4f. Resolves ethical dilemmas by employing an ethical decision-making model appropriate to work in schools
- II-B-4g. Models ethical behavior
- II-B-4k. Understands and applies an ethical and legal obligation not only to students but to parents, administration, and teachers as well



Additionally, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has created a Code of Ethics as a guide for professional counselors. More specifically, ACA's Code of Ethics, "sets forth the ethical obligations of ACA members and provides guidance intended to inform the ethical practice of professional counselors" (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014). The ACA Code of Ethics speaks directly to the responsibility of counselor educators by including the following standard in its Code of Ethics:

- F.7.e. Teaching Ethics: Throughout the program, counselor educators ensure that students are aware of the ethical responsibilities and standards of the profession and the ethical responsibilities of students to the profession. Counselor educators infuse ethical considerations throughout the curriculum

Moreover, counselor training programs must adhere to particular standards and competencies set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP). This organization established a set of standards that will, "ensure that students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills to practice effectively" (CACREP, 2009). The standards that counselor educators must ensure their students master include:

- G.1j. Ethical standards of professional organizations and credentialing bodies, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling

Since school counselors and counselor educators are required to abide by legal and ethical standards and competencies set forth by the profession and the state of South Carolina, it is imperative that graduate training programs adequately prepare graduate students to handle legal and ethical issues they may encounter in the field (Colby & Long, 1994; Hermann, 2002). The initial training school counselors receive regarding

ethics is during their graduate program. Although counselor educators prefer to utilize lecture and discussion techniques as their primary modes of ethical instruction, they do not follow a universal ethics curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004; Patel, Hagedorn, & Bai, 2013). While studies have been conducted to examine strategies and techniques utilized by counselor educators to teach ethics to graduate students, they are limited in that they do not take their investigations a step further by examining whether the chosen strategies and techniques prepare counselors to effectively respond to legal and ethical challenges. (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2005; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Colby & Long, 1994).

Although some programs offer stand-alone ethics courses, other programs infuse ethics as a topic across their curriculum (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Neukrug & Milliken, 2011; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004). Graduate programs that offer stand-alone ethics courses often heighten their students' awareness of legal and ethical issues (Welfel & Lipsitz, 1983). Additionally, some counselor educators believe that infused programs are ineffective in adequately training graduate students (Handelsman, 1986). Instead, they believe that a stand-alone course in ethics should be offered to graduate students to adequately prepare them to manage these types of issues in the field (Handelsman, 1986). While CACREP does not require graduate programs to offer a stand-alone course in ethics, literature suggests that graduates of CACREP-accredited programs are less likely to face ethical misconduct sanctions compared to graduates from non-CACREP accredited programs (Even and Robinson, 2013). While research explores the use of stand-alone courses and infused curricula in counselor education programs (Neukrug & Milliken, 2011; Handelsman, 1986; Urofsky & Sowd, 2004; Agresti 1992; Downs, 2003;

Hill, 2004), few studies have investigated the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues (Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010; Even & Robinson, 2013).

Although all school counselors are required to abide by legal and ethical standards and competencies set forth by the profession and the state of South Carolina, there are undoubtedly those school counselors who do not abide by them. For some school counselors, they may be less prepared to effectively manage legal and ethical issues in the field. In order to consider some of the reasons for the differences in preparedness, the researcher was attempting the current study as a means for determining the preparedness of middle school counselors to effectively manage legal and ethical issues.

### **Problem Statement**

As school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing civil and criminal liability, it is important they feel prepared to effectively handle legal and ethical issues they may encounter in the profession (Hermann, 2002). There is a great deal of research detailing the legal system as it relates to school counseling (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999; Remley & Herlihy, 2001; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Lambie, 2005; Glossoff, 2002; Isaac, 1997; Capuzzi, 2002; Barsky, 2012; Boy & Pine, 1968), the types of legal and ethical issues counselors face in their daily work (Beamish & Navin, 1994; Lawrence & Kurpius, 2000; Remley, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie & Conley, 2014), perceptions of counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues (Gibson & Pope, 1993, Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997; Remley & Huey, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie & Conley, 2014), strategies and techniques utilized by counselor educators to teach ethics to graduate students (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Corey, Corey, &

Callanan, 2005; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Colby & Long, 1994), and the use of stand-alone courses and infused curricula for teaching ethics and legal issues in counselor educator programs (Neukrug & Milliken, 2011; Handelsman, 1986; Urofsky & Sowd, 2004; Agresti 1992; Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004). However, there are limited studies that have investigated the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues (Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010; Even & Robinson, 2013).

As school counseling programs continue to allow graduates to enter the profession, research has shown very little of their preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. Another area of research that is lacking in information is the influence of graduate training programs on preparedness to manage legal and ethical issues. Although research indicates that there are differences in the types of techniques and methods utilized by counselor educators to teach ethics courses, there is limited research regarding the influence of stand-alone courses and infused curricula. More specifically, the format of ethics training may be an influencing factor in the preparedness of school counselors in regards to handling legal and ethical issues.

The factors that may influence school counselors' preparedness have seen very little and inconsistent research (Hermann, 2002). As school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing criminal and civil court proceedings, it is necessary to take a serious look at school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues (Remley, 2002). It is the belief of the researcher that there may be an effect of middle school counselors' graduate training (infused curricula versus stand-alone courses) and their preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues. The current study

intends to study preparedness of middle school counselors with regards to legal and ethical issues and determine where gaps may lie within their perceptions of preparedness.

### **Nature of Study**

The current study hoped to answer the following research question: What effect do stand-alone courses and infused curricula have on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues? While investigating these differences, the following hypotheses will be considered in regards to graduate program preparation and perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues:

1. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
2. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
3. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to

- handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
4. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  5. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  6. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  7. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale

8. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
9. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
10. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
11. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
12. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle

- counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
13. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  14. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  15. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  16. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale



17. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
18. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale

Additional information on the nature of the study, including the research design, survey instrument, and procedures of the study will be discussed at greater length in chapter three.

### **Purpose of Study**

The current study seeks to focus on middle school counselors in South Carolina perceptions of preparedness to effectively respond to different types of legal and ethical issues. Specifically, the researcher hoped to answer the following research question: What effect do stand-alone courses and infused curricula have on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues?

It was unknown by the researcher as to what degree middle school counselors feel prepared to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues. The researcher wanted to study this area as a means for gaining more insight into the factors that may determine middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues.

The information gained in this study may provide a number of implications for further study into this topic. The assumption of the researcher was that the current study would uncover a significant difference between the groups of middle school counselors. This perceived difference may provide the researcher with the opportunity to present the need for additional training among middle school counselors.

### **Background and Theoretical Base**

After taking into account the information to be gained by this study, the researcher opted to use a quantitative approach. Accordingly, the researcher utilized a quantitative theoretical framework for the current research study. A qualitative approach may have produced detailed results that could explain the research question in an alternative way (Orcher, 2005). The researcher could decide to interview a few middle school counselors and ask more comprehensive questions about their personal perceptions and ability to effectively handle legal and ethical issues. By doing so, the responses would be in-depth and solely pertain to the school counselors being interviewed. However, the researcher considered the various implication of the research study and decided to make the study's results more generalizable to a greater population. In deciding the research design for the study, the researcher contemplated the research question to be answered and decided that a quasi-experimental design was appropriate because no variables were being manipulated in the study (Orcher, 2005). Additionally, the groups of school counselors participating in the study were not randomized.

The current study compared existing groups of school counselors; therefore, it was a non-experimental study and the research was causal-comparative in nature (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). It was appropriate to use a causal-comparative design for the

study because it does not manipulate the independent variables (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). This study will try to determine potential differences among the groups being compared. Although several studies have been conducted to determine the types of legal and ethical issues school counselors encounter while on the job (Beamish & Navin, 1994; Lawrence & Kurpius, 2000; Remley, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie & Conley, 2014), there are only a few studies that examine counselors' perceptions of their ability to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues (Gibson & Pope, 1993, Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997; Remley & Huey, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie & Conley, 2014).

This study sought to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' perceptions of their ability to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues by using the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale created by Mullen, Lambie, and Conley (2014). By using this survey, the researcher was able to compare the responses of several middle school counselors. Although a qualitative approach would have provided a snapshot into the perceptions of school counselors who had a stand-alone course in ethics and legal issues and school counselors who had ethics and legal issues infused in all of their course work, it would not have been possible for the researcher to assume the perception of these counselors in comparison to one another. Hence, a causal-comparative research design permitted the researcher to compare the groups of middle school counselors without allowing her potential bias to negatively impact the results of the study. Moreover, the use of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale allowed the results to be generalizable and used to a greater degree in the school counseling field.

## **Operational Definitions**

To account for variation in definitions throughout different disciplines that may be used by the reading audience, the following terms and definitions will be used in the study. To generate these operational definitions, the researcher utilized peer-reviewed literature, published documents from the American School Counselor Association, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Wikipedia, and Encarta Online Dictionary. For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as:

1. **American School Counselor Association:** The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, emotional/social and career development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. (<http://schoolcounselor.org>).
2. **Case Law:** For the purposes of this study, case law refers to judges' rulings from previous cases.
3. **Civil Law:** For the purposes of this study, civil law refers to citizens' private rights and remedies.
4. **Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Accreditation:** The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs provides recognition that the content and quality of a graduate training program has been evaluated and meets all of the standards set forth by the profession (CACREP, 2009).
5. **Criminal Law:** For the purposes of this study, criminal law refers to statutes that impose sanctions for violating public rules.

6. **Gender:** The behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits that generally relate to one sex.
7. **Highest Degree Earned:** For the purposes of this study, highest degree earned will refer to the highest educational degree a participant has earned in the field of counseling.
8. **Infused Curricula:** For the purposes of this study, an infused curriculum will refer graduate training programs that integrate legal and ethics education into the counselor curriculum.
9. **Jurisdiction:** For the purposes of this study, jurisdiction refers to the geographic areas for which a court has authority.
10. **Malpractice:** For the purposes of this study, malpractice refers to civil liability for failing to exercise a duty of care that other professionals would have exercised in a same or similar situation.
11. **Middle School Counselor:** For the purposes of this study, a middle school counselor will be defined as a school counselor who works in a public school setting serving students in grades 6-8.
12. **New School Counselor:** Due to minimal literature available in defining new school counselors, for the purpose of this study, the term “new school counselor” will refer to those school counselors with five or less years of experience as a professional school counselor.
13. **Negligent:** For the purposes of this study, negligent will be defined as unintentional or reckless failure to act as a reasonable person would act.

14. **Participant:** For the purposes of this study, a participant is considered to be a middle school counselor who completed the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and electronically submitted his or her survey to the researcher. The term may be used interchangeably with the term respondent.
15. **Plaintiff:** For the purposes of this study, a plaintiff will be defined as a person who brings a lawsuit.
16. **Preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues:** For the purposes of the current study, preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues will be defined as the scaled score on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The scale ranges from 0 (cannot do at all) to 100 (highly certain can do).
17. **Respondent:** For the purposes of this study, a respondent is considered to be a middle school counselor who completed the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and electronically submitted his or her survey to the researcher. This term may be used interchangeably with the term participant.
18. **School counselor:** Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling. The school counselor supports a safe learning environment and works to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community and addresses the needs of all students through culturally appropriate programs (ASCA, 2005).

19. **Stand-alone course:** For the purposes of this study, a stand-alone course will refer to a separate and formal ethics course taken by school counselors during their graduate training program. A course that focuses on critical issues in the field of education or legal and policy issues in special education would not be considered a separate and formal legal and/or ethics course in school counseling. However, courses that focus on professional identity and ethics or professional, legal, and ethical issues in school counseling would be considered a separate and formal legal and/or ethics course in school counseling.
20. **Statute:** For the purposes of this study, statute will be defined as law derived from legislative enactments.
21. **Veteran School Counselor:** Due to minimal literature available in defining veteran school counselors, for the purposes of this study, the term “veteran school counselor” will refer to those school counselors with six or more years of experience as a professional school counselor.
22. **Work Setting:** For the purposes of this study, working setting will refer to the location of the school in which the professional school counselor is employed. This may be defined as rural, urban, or suburban.
23. **Years of Experience:** The number of full years of experience a respondent has as a school counselor.

## **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

The assumption of the researcher was that key legal and ethical issues were identified based on the literature. It was also assumed that the participants in this study understood the survey instrument.

Another assumption was that the professional role of the researcher will not contaminate this quantitative study because the researcher will not have personal and/or direct contact with the participants. More specifically, since the researcher will solely be analyzing data, the researcher's professional role will not come into play. Instead, the research will remain objective for this study.

The researcher identified the colleges and universities in South Carolina that offer a school counseling program. Moreover, the researcher determined which colleges and universities currently offer a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. It was the assumption of the researcher that historically these schools have either provided a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of the study was the survey instrument. More specifically, since the survey instrument utilized a Likert-type scale to evaluate the degree participants felt prepared to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues, they were limited in their responses that they could provide to each of the questions.

Another limitation of the study was the bias of the researcher. Presently, the researcher is a full-time school counselor in South Carolina. Accordingly, the researcher's employment status may impact the results of the study.



A third limitation of the study was the truthfulness of the participants. Even though the survey results will remain confidential, participants may not be honest when reporting their perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. They may do this for two reasons: (1) they believe their response may be socially undesirable, and (2) they may respond the way they think the researcher will want them to respond (Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

A fourth limitation of the study is the assumption that the colleges and universities listed in the Demographic Data Questionnaire historically offered either a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. The researcher used the current course requirements to determine if the colleges and universities offered a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. Accordingly, if the course requirements have changed over the years, then the respondents may not be put into the correct group.

Lastly, the researcher's choice of instrumentation for the survey may be considered a limitation. While the researchers tested the Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale for reliability and validity, the instrument has yet to be utilized for a research study because it was only recently created in 2014. The subscales of the ELICSES reported on survey respondents' suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. Although these subscales can infer one's preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues, the scale did not specifically measure 'preparedness with legal and legal issues'. A different survey instrument may have yielded the researcher with a diverse set of data results.

## **Scope**

The scope of the present study includes middle school counselors in a sixth through eighth grade setting in South Carolina. Even though the scope of this study only includes perceptions of middle school counselors in South Carolina, the results from this study can provide insight into the legal and ethical training needs of middle school counselors in the United States.

## **Delimitations**

A delimitation of this study is that participation is limited to middle school counselors in South Carolina. Moreover, this study only includes middle school counselors. By not having feedback from high school and elementary school counselors and limiting participants to those in South Carolina, the complete scope of the issue of perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues cannot be completely addressed.

## **Significance of the Study**

The researcher determined that the following areas were significant to the study: knowledge generation, professional application, and social change.

### **Knowledge Generation**

This study aimed to broaden the knowledge of school counselors by examining the effects of stand-alone and infused courses on middle school counselors' perceptions of their ability to effectively handle legal and ethical issues. All school counselors, regardless of graduate program training, may benefit from the opportunity to receive legal and ethical training.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has created standards and competencies as a guide for professional school counselors. More specifically, ASCA's competencies, "outline the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes that ensure school

counselors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the need of pre K-12 students” (ASCA, School Counselor Competencies, 2007). These competencies include:

- I-A-7. Knowledge of legal, ethical, and professional issues in pre K-12 schools
- I-B-1g. Demonstrates multicultural, ethical, and professional competencies in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the comprehensive school counseling program
- II-A-7. Knowledge of legal and ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and educational systems, including district and building policies
- II-B-4. Applies the ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and adheres to the legal aspects of the role of the school counselor
- II-B-4a. Practices ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for school counselors
- II-B-4f. Resolves ethical dilemmas by employing an ethical decision-making model appropriate to work in schools
- II-B-4g. Models ethical behavior
- II-B-4k. Understands and applies an ethical and legal obligation not only to students but to parents, administration, and teachers as well

Additionally, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has created a Code of Ethics as a guide for professional counselors. More specifically, ACA’s Code of Ethics, “sets forth the ethical obligations of ACA members and provides guidance intended to inform the ethical practice of professional counselors” (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014). The

ACA Code of Ethics speaks directly to the responsibility of counselor educators, by including the following standard in its Code of Ethics:

- F.7.e. Teaching Ethics: Throughout the program, counselor educators ensure that students are aware of the ethical responsibilities and standards of the profession and the ethical responsibilities of students to the profession. Counselor educators infuse ethical considerations throughout the curriculum

Moreover, counselor training programs must adhere to particular standards and competencies set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP). This organization established a set of standards that will, “ensure that students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills to practice effectively (CACREP, 2009). The standards that counselor educators must ensure their students master include:

24. G.1j. Ethical standards of professional organizations and credentialing bodies, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling

As school counselors consider the criteria set forth by ASCA and counselor educators consider the standards set forth by CACREP and ACA in regards to legal and ethical competencies of school counselors, it will be important to consider the knowledge created by the present study. School counselors and counselor educators’ adherence to these competencies and standards justifies the need for the present study. If school counselors are not able to manage legal and ethical issues, it will be more difficult to adhere to these competencies. School counselors can share data from the current study with their school districts to advocate for additional legal and ethical training. Moreover, counselor educators can use this data to justify changes in their

counselor training programs to meet the standards set forth by CACREP and ACA. The knowledge gained by this study has the potential to promote supplemental training for all K-12 school counselors who are experiencing lower perceptions of preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues.

### **Professional Application**

Middle school counselors in South Carolina may use the results of the study to advocate for legal and ethical training from their school districts. Similarly, counselor educators may use the results of this study to justify changes in counselor training programs. By doing so, school counselors may increase their perceptions of preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues. The knowledge obtained from the results of this study may also extend to elementary and high school counselors. Moreover, the results of this study may extend to school counselors outside of South Carolina. The researcher planned to use the results from this study to encourage school counselors to request additional legal and ethical training. Lastly, the researcher hoped that the results of this study would help counselor educators advocate for program changes that would apply to future graduate students.

### **Social Change**

Social change can be created for future school counselors when the researcher finds considerable differences in middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues. School counselors may encounter difficulties in responding to legal and ethical issues within the school setting. However, the school counseling profession has a duty to increase the effectiveness of its school counselors by assisting them in advocating for additional legal and ethical training. The

social change generated by the results of this study is a clearer understanding of the needs of middle school counselors in relation to legal and ethical training. Accordingly, school districts can provide legal and ethical training to all of their school counselors. Similarly, graduate training programs can alter their curricula to best meet the needs of all of their graduate students. By doing so, graduate students and school counselors will be adequately trained, which will ultimately lead to higher perceptions of preparedness to effectively handle legal and ethical issues.

### **Summary**

School counselors must abide by federal and states laws and statutes. Additionally, they are required to abide by competencies and standards set forth by the profession. When school counselors fail to abide by laws, statutes, competencies, and standards, they may face criminal and/or civil court proceedings. School counselors may experience varying degrees of preparedness to effectively handle legal and ethical issues, and the current study seeks to find out what differences may occur in their perceptions of preparedness. More specifically, the researcher hoped to determine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues. These assumed differences may provide implications for further study into this area as well as the need for additional ethics training for graduate students and school counselors in the future. In the next chapter, a review of the literature will be presented. Chapter three includes the research methodology used in this study, including a description of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale, procedures for data collection and analysis and study limitations. The results of the study will be presented in chapter four. Chapter five will

provide an interpretation of the findings and implications for future research studies based on these findings.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this chapter is to offer an overview of the literature related to differences in preparedness with handling legal and ethical issues in middle school counselors. Current literature related to school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues is narrow in scope. Additionally, empirical research on this topic is limited too. Accordingly, the following literature review addresses legal and ethical issues as they relate to school counselors, such as preparedness, attitudes, perceptions, and graduate training programs. Moreover, the literature review includes forty articles ranging in dates from 1968 through 2014.

The review of the literature examined several areas: an overview of the legal system, legal and ethical issues in counseling, perceptions of preparedness to effectively handle legal and ethical issues, and graduate training programs. Information regarding the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and causal-comparative research will be discussed. Several of the studies in the literature review are presented from the perspective of various educators due to the lack of studies completed utilizing school counselors. The areas discussed within the literature review were related to the variables in the study and associated with the research question.

#### **Content and Organization of Review**

A review of the literature regarding school counselor preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues rendered a progression of common themes which guided and organized



the review. The understanding of school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues necessitated an understanding of the foundations of the legal system. The following chapter is organized based on the following themes: an overview of the legal system in counseling, legal and ethical issues in counseling, perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues, graduate training programs, defining stand-alone courses and infused curricula for graduate training programs, the use of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale, and causal-comparative research.

### **Strategy Used for Searching the Literature**

In conducting a literature review for the topic of school counselors' perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues, the literature search began in the Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina. The online resources available through the library were utilized by the researcher as a means for accessing article databases and indexes and electronic resources. Key terms that were used in the search included: counselor and legal/ethical issues, school counselor and legal/ethical issues, school counselor and preparedness with legal/ethical issues, school counselor and graduate training programs, school counselor and ethical decision-making models, CACREP standards, ASCA competencies, school counselor and stand-alone legal/ethics course, school counselor and infused legal/ethics curriculum, legal system, Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale, and causal-comparative research. Primary search engines for information included Academic Premier, ERIC (EBSCO), and Psych INFO. Moreover, professional journals such as *Professional School Counseling*, *Counselor Education and Supervision*, and *Journal of Counseling and Development* were utilized in conducting the search for literature.

## **An Overview of the Legal System in Counseling**

Law can be defined as, “a body of principles, standards, and rules that govern human behavior by creating obligations as well as rights, and by imposing penalties” (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). School counselors must abide by federal and state laws, as well as state statutes; however these laws and statutes lack practical meaning until judges interpret them in the court of law (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Therefore, the interpretations of laws and statutes influence the legal obligations school counselors owe to their clients (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Moreover, case law in other states can influence a judge’s decision in the counselor’s jurisdiction (Hudgins & Vacca, 1999). Accordingly, since the legal obligation of school counselors is multifaceted, they are likely to face a number of legal issues.

When school counselors do not fulfill their legal obligations, they may be subject to civil and/or criminal court proceedings (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). If a school counselor violates a criminal law, the government may take action (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). Additionally, depending on the outcome of the case, the school counselor may have to pay a fine or serve time in prison (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). In contrast, a person may bring a civil suit against a school counselor (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). If the court determines that the school counselor was negligent, the school counselor may have to pay damages to the plaintiff (Remley & Herlihy, 2001).

When clients feel that they have been harmed emotionally and/or physically by a professional, they may file a malpractice lawsuit (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). In order for a malpractice lawsuit to be successful, the client must establish: (1) the school counselor had a duty to the client, (2) the school counselor breached the duty owed to the

client, and (3) the client was mentally and/or physically harmed by the professional (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). Moreover, in order for professionals to be found negligent, the court must determine that they did not, “exercise the knowledge, skill, and judgment common to other members in the profession” (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998). In today’s litigious society, school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing malpractice lawsuits (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998).

There are a number of ways school counselors can violate criminal and civil laws. For example, if school counselors fail to report suspected child abuse, they may face criminal penalties and civil liability (Lambie, 2005). Additionally, failure to maintain confidentiality has also led to criminal and civil court proceedings for school counselors (Glosoff, 2002). The duty to warn and protect has been an area that school counselors have been found negligent (Isaacs, 1997). Moreover, school counselors have been found liable for not protecting suicidal clients (Capuzzi, 2002). When school counselors respond or fail to respond to a subpoena, they may face civil or criminal issues (Barsky, 2012). Lastly, school counselors may encounter civil and criminal court proceedings if they are found to be incompetent (Boy & Pine, 1968).

A basic understanding of the legal system in counseling allows one to better comprehend the legal and ethical challenges school counselors face in the field. Existing literature reflects the legal and ethical dilemmas school counselors encounter in the profession; however, research presents information regarding limited information on school counselors’ perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. The literature also does not clearly reflect the effects of graduate training programs on school counselors’ preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues in their daily work.

The researcher intended to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. This topic of study was justified due to the lack of research regarding this area. Very limited research has been conducted in regards to school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. The findings of the current study may help to support changes in graduate training curricula by shedding light on the possible reasons why school counselors feel unprepared to manage legal and ethical issues they encounter in their daily work. In reviewing the American School Counselor Association's School Counselor Competencies (2007), it is clear that school counselors will need to understand and be comfortable with handling legal and ethical issues within the work setting. Moreover, in reviewing the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs standards (2009), it is clear that counselor educators must adequately prepare their graduate students to understand and be comfortable with handling legal and ethical issues that they may encounter in the counseling profession. The current study will open the door to addressing this topic with the hopes that future research will follow suit.

### **Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling**

When considering school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues, it is important to first identify and understand the types of legal and ethical issues that they commonly encounter in the field. Although some of the literature reviewed was outside of the school counseling field and dated, it was used in the current study as a means for providing a foundational background on the types of issues school counselors face in their daily work.

Beamish and Navin (1994) surveyed literature on the legal and ethical issues mental health counselors may face when working with couples and families. One of the ethical issues mental health counselors encounter when working with couples and families is determining which client the counselor is ethically bound to protect. More specifically, the counselor is bound to protect the welfare of the family and each individual in the family; however, there are interventions that may benefit the family as a whole but may not promote the welfare of all family members. Another ethical dilemma is the issue surrounding informed consent. In particular, issues may arise when children refuse to participate in family counseling. Additionally, ethical issues may surface when determining who should participate in the therapeutic process, especially when family members refuse to participate in counseling. The author noted that ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality may arise when working with families. More specifically, since family members may withhold information from other members of the family, the counselor may be conflicted on maintaining confidentiality. The author concluded by offering implications for mental health counselor training. More specifically, the author suggested that mental health counselors must be cognizant of the fact that general codes of ethics will not prepare them to handle ethical dilemmas they may encounter when working with families. Although the article addresses legal and ethical issues mental health counselors face in their daily work, it fails to address specific issues as they relate to school counselors.

Lawrence and Kurpius (2000) identified four primary ethical issues counselors encounter while working with minors in non-school settings. The first ethical dilemma is counselor competence. More specifically, counselors must not assume that their ability

to counsel adults will transfer to children. Instead, counselors must be thoroughly trained in developmental theories and interventions that are geared towards minors. The second ethical issue counselors encounter when working with minors involves informed consent. More specifically, counselors must obtain informed consent from a minor's parent or guardian. If counselors fail to secure informed consent, they may face civil court proceedings. The third ethical dilemma counselors encounter when working with minors is confidentiality. More specifically, there are no clear guidelines in regards to disclosing information to parents or guardians. The fourth ethical dilemma is determining whether or not to report suspected child abuse. The law requires counselors to report suspected child abuse; however, counselors may be hesitant to report suspected child abuse because it may negatively impact the therapeutic relationship that the counselor has with the minor. This article is relevant to the present study because it specifically addresses legal and ethical issues counselors face when working with minors. However, the article falls short because it does not address issues specific to school counselors.

Remley (2002) discussed key legal and ethical issues school counselors encounter in their daily work. More specifically, he suggested that school counselors encounter the following legal and ethical dilemmas: privacy for minor clients in school settings, negligence as it relates to academic advising and abortion counseling, counseling students who pose a threat to themselves or others, and counseling suicidal students. This article is advantageous to the present study, because it clearly identifies legal and ethical issues that school counselors face in the school setting. However, this article falls short, because it does not provide an empirical basis for choosing these particular issues.

Instead, they were chosen because of the authors experience in the field and based on the author's survey of literature on this topic.

The literature highlights different types of legal and ethical issues school counselors may encounter in the field. However, the literature fails to address which types of legal and ethical issues are most common for school counselors. Hermann (2002) filled this void by conducting a study that assessed the types and frequency of legal and ethical issues that school counselors face in their daily work.

Since there were no studies that addressed the legal and ethical issues of school counselors and the prevalence of these issues, Hermann (2002) created the Legal Issues in Counseling Survey. The survey included common legal and ethical issues that have been highlighted in the literature. Accordingly, the legal and ethical issues that were reflected in the survey included the following: determining whether to report suspected child abuse, counselor/student confidentiality, determining whether a student poses a danger to others, determining whether a student is suicidal, and responding to a subpoena. The survey required participants to indicate the approximate number of times in the past year that they encountered the legal and ethical issues listed in the survey. The results indicated that determining whether to report suspected child abuse, determining whether a client is suicidal, and determining whether a client poses a danger to others were the most common issues encountered by school counselors. The results also indicated that the least common issues faced by school counselors included responding to a subpoena and being asked to turn over confidential records. The identification of legal and ethical issues commonly faced by school counselors can assist school counselors and counselor educators in becoming cognizant of particular legal and ethical areas that they may be

vulnerable. Furthermore, it provides a springboard for modifications in legal and ethical training curricula that graduate training programs offer to their counseling students.

Similarly, Mullen, Lambie, and Conley (2014) created a scale to assess legal and ethical issues in counseling. More specifically, the researchers created the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale in response to the lack of measurement tools available to assess legal and ethical issues in the field of counseling. The researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review to determine the initial legal and ethical issues to include in their pool. Ultimately, the researchers were able to identify 23 legal and ethical issues that counselors are likely to encounter in the profession. Additionally, they were able to identify three subscales: (a) general ethical and legal issues self-efficacy; (b) suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy, and (c) counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. Although this is the first reliable and valid instrument to assess counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues, it has not been utilized by any researchers thus far. Accordingly, the proposed study will be the first to utilize this instrument to investigate school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues.

The intent of the researcher in the current study was to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively handle legal and ethical issues by surveying middle school counselors. Research shows the very deep impact that legal and ethical issues have had and are continuing to have on the counseling profession (Barsky, 2012). There is no doubt that some familiarity with legal and ethical issues is quickly becoming a necessity in order to decrease school counselors' vulnerability to civil and criminal liability. Numerous types



of legal and ethical issues are currently being encountered within the profession—from determining whether to report suspected child abuse to determining whether students pose a threat to themselves or others (Hermann, 2002). Some counselor education programs are preparing counselors to enter the profession with legal and ethical training in order to begin their careers with a high standard for legal and ethical preparedness within the profession (Urofsky & Sowa, 2004). The understanding that legal and ethical training must be a core component in graduate training programs is shifting towards becoming more of a rule than an exception.

### **Perceptions of Preparedness to Respond to Legal and Ethical Issues**

Individual attitudes and perceptions about preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues is a topic of interest to many researchers. The counseling profession is on the slower side of this growing trend of research, as is exemplified by the limited studies completed that examine counselors' attitudes and perceptions regarding their preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. The need to understand and be prepared to handle legal and ethical issues in the work setting is becoming more prevalent as school counselors are at an increased risk of facing civil and criminal liability (Rawls, 1997). While the need undoubtedly exists, many professionals and aspiring professionals still feel ill-prepared to handle legal and ethical issues. Research does not provide one specific reason for unpreparedness, but it does consider consultation with colleagues (Gibson and Pope, 1993), graduate training programs (Davis and Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997; Remley and Huey, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie, and Conley, 2014), and continuing education (Hermann, 2002) as possible reasons for differences in preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues.

Gibson and Pope (1993) endeavored to gain insight into counselors' beliefs regarding ethical behaviors, their confidence in determining if a behavior is ethical or unethical, and the degree outside resources aid them in the ethical decision-making process. The researchers had 579 counselors complete a survey questionnaire that presented 88 ethical behaviors as they pertain to the counseling profession. The survey asked the participants to indicate whether or not they believed the behaviors presented were ethical or unethical. Additionally, the survey also asked participants to indicate the degree to which they felt confident in their assessment of whether the behavior was ethical or unethical. Lastly, the instrument asked participants to indicate the degree to which they found a list of 16 sources useful in their ethical decision-making process.

The results of the study indicated that 21 behaviors were overwhelmingly endorsed as unethical, while 11 behaviors were overwhelmingly endorsed as ethical. Participants indicated that they were tentative or uncertain in making judgments in the following areas: accepting services from a client in lieu of fees, using a collection agency to collect fees, allowing a client to run up a large unpaid bill, using a lawsuit to collect fees from a client, accepting goods as payment, and avoiding certain clients for fear of being sued. The results indicated that participants were most confident in making judgments regarding confidentiality. Lastly, the participants indicated that consultation with colleagues, ACA ethical principles, internship experiences, and graduate training programs were the most useful resources in aiding them when faced with an ethical dilemma. Although the study examined counselors' confidence in assessing ethical and unethical behaviors, it failed to delve deeper by analyzing their preparedness to respond to the behaviors. The current study will address this deficiency by providing counselors

with legal and ethical dilemmas and having them assess their preparedness to respond to them.

Davis and Mickelson (1994) conducted a study that examined legal and ethical dilemmas faced by school counselors. The study aimed to identify the types of ethical dilemmas that are most difficult for school counselors to respond to in their daily work. The participants in this study included 165 school counselors that were employed in elementary, middle, and high school settings. The participants completed the Ethics and Legal Issues Questionnaire. The questionnaire included 16 ethical dilemmas and 15 legal dilemmas. For each dilemma, the participants were asked to indicate whether they strongly disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree, or strongly agree with the counselors' action. The researchers identified the preferred legal or ethical action for each dilemma based on the appropriate state and federal statutes and the American Association for Counseling and Development Ethical Standards.

Based on the results, the researchers identified seven dilemmas that school counselors had difficulty responding to in their daily work. The seven dilemmas included: (1) balancing the rights of parents to be informed about their child's behavior and the need to maintain confidentiality to work effectively with the student, (2) working with a student who is already receiving counseling because the ethical standards require school counselors not to enter into a counseling relationship with a person who is already receiving counseling without first contacting and receiving the approval of the professional, (3) participating in locker searches, (4) the rights of parents in regards to accessing student records, (5) recognizing limits to competence and only performing functions in which they are adequately trained, (6) third-party access to student records,

and (7) parental notification when referring a student who is experiencing problems resulting from drug and/or alcohol use to an appropriate outside agency. The authors suggest that counselor educators, practicum and internship supervisors, and school counselors must be proactive in ensuring that all school counselors are up-to-date on the legal and ethical standards of the profession. While this study examined legal and ethical issues that school counselors felt prepared and unprepared to handle in their daily work, it failed to analyze the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on their preparedness. The present study will fill this void by examining the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas.

Rawls (1997) intended to discover the degree of legal knowledge in school law among high school counselors in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The researcher developed an instrument to assess school counselors' knowledge of school law in the following areas: tort liability, high school counselors and their employment, and legal issues as they pertain to student rights. Participants were selected via random sampling and included 250 school counselors from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The results indicated that school counselors had difficulty with legal issues pertaining to counseling suicidal clients, confidentiality, privileged communication, and reporting suspected child abuse. In regards to improving knowledge of school law, participants made the following recommendations: offering workshops and district in-services (67.2%), providing additional courses beyond graduate school training (16.4%), and taking a specific course on legal and ethical issues while in their graduate training program (9.6%). The results of this study support the need for additional empirical studies on the relationship between

graduate training curricula and preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. The present study will attempt to close this gap in literature.

Similarly, Remley and Huey (2002) created an ethics quiz to encourage school counselors to evaluate their knowledge and understanding of legal standards and ethical competencies as they pertain to the profession. The authors included experiences that school counselors encounter on a daily basis as evidenced by current literature. Although this article did not provide empirical data related to school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues identified in the quiz, it suggests that counselor educators may utilize the quiz as an impetus for class discussion and increasing graduate students' knowledge and understanding of the legal and ethical issues school counselors are likely to encounter in the profession. Although the quiz raised school counselors' awareness regarding legal and ethical issues that are common in the counseling field, it failed to assess school counselors' preparedness to handle the issues. The present study will address this deficiency by investigating school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical challenges they encounter in their daily work.

Hermann (2002) conducted a study to investigate the legal issues encountered by school counselors and perceptions of their preparedness to respond to legal challenges. The researcher invited 500 participants from the American School Counselor Association and 500 participants from the American Mental Health Counselors Association to participate in the study. The sample consisted of 273 school counselors from every state except Montana, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The Legal Issues in Counseling Survey was developed by the researcher because there were no previous studies that addressed legal issues and school counselors' perceptions of their ability to

effectively respond to legal issues in their daily work. The results of the study indicated that school counselors felt most prepared to handle determining whether to report suspected child abuse and determining whether a client is suicidal. Alternatively, the results indicated that school counselors were least prepared to respond to a subpoena to appear as a witness in a legal proceeding. The results also suggest that school counselors who recently participated in ethics workshops and those that took a course in ethics and legal issues felt more prepared to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. Accordingly, graduate training and continuing education seem to be critical factors in school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues. The current study will take this research a step further by investigating the effects of graduate training programs on school counselors' preparedness to effectively handle legal and ethical dilemmas.

In an attempt to close the gap on the lack of research regarding school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues, Mullen, Lambie, and Conley (2014) created the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The authors defined self-efficacy as school counselors' confidence in their ability to respond to legal and ethical issues. Although the sole focus of this article was to present a rationale and review the procedures used to develop the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale, the initial testing of the measurement tool indicated that school counselors were least confident in responding to a subpoena for records. The authors suggest that counselor educators can use this tool to assess graduate students' degrees of confidence with handling legal and ethical issues. Moreover, they suggest that counselor educators may modify their curricula to increase their students' perceptions of

preparedness to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. Since this tool was just recently published in January of 2014, it has not been utilized by any researchers to study counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. Therefore, the present study will be the first to utilize this assessment tool to investigate this topic.

As one considers the need to address school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues, the American School Counselor Association's School Counselor Competencies (2007) should be taken into account. The ASCA competencies outline the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed by school counselors in order to meet the needs of their students and the demands of the profession. The competencies that are specifically applicable to school counselors and ethics include:

- I-A-7. Knowledge of legal, ethical, and professional issues in pre K-12 schools
- I-B-1g. Demonstrates multicultural, ethical, and professional competencies in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the comprehensive school counseling program
- II-A-7. Knowledge of legal and ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and educational systems, including district and building policies
- II-B-4. Applies the ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and adheres to the legal aspects of the role of the school counselor
- II-B-4a. Practices ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for school counselors
- II-B-4f. Resolves ethical dilemmas by employing an ethical decision-making model appropriate to work in schools

- II-B-4g. Models ethical behavior
- II-B-4k. Understands and applies an ethical and legal obligation not only to students but to parents, administration, and teachers as well

The competencies specific to legal and ethical preparedness within ASCA's School Counselors Competencies demonstrate the clear need for a better understanding of school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. Without knowing if school counselors are familiar with prominent legal and ethical issues in the profession, and if they are, how prepared they are to handle them, then some school counselors will not be able to comply with the competencies. ASCA should also consider the ability of school counselors to comply with these competencies if they do not feel prepared to respond to legal and ethical issues. Since there are few studies that address school counselors' preparedness to manage legal and ethical issues, the current study was justified in its examination of middle school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues.

This portion of the literature review provided the researcher with the most promise in regards to the research topic for the present study. There is, however, very limited research in the area of school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. In a similar nature to earlier sections presented, there exists a great deal of literature involving the types of legal and ethical issues school counselors encounter in their daily work. There are also studies involving school counselors' familiarity with the legal and ethical aspects of counseling. This information does not begin to close the gap in what we do not know about school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. This topic has been shown little to no attention by researchers, although



the information to be gained by filling such a gap is extremely research worthy. The researcher examined the topic of graduate training programs and middle school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues in the hopes to bring attention to a topic that is in much need of being explored by researchers. The data gained by this and future studies in this area may begin to close the gap in how stand-alone courses and infused curricula may or may not be affecting school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues in their daily work.

### **Graduate Training Programs**

As school counselors are at a heightened risk for facing civil and criminal liability, counselor educators have become increasingly concerned with offering legal and ethical training to graduate students (Remley, 2002). Moreover, CACREP has modified its standards and now requires graduate training programs to offer legal and ethical training to their counseling students (Downs, 2003). Accordingly, the effect of graduate training programs on counselors' perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues has become a topic of interest to counselor educators. While studies have been conducted to examine strategies and techniques utilized by counselor educators to teach ethics to graduate students (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2005; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Colby & Long, 1994) and explore the use of stand-alone courses and infused curricula in counselor education programs (Neukrug & Milliken, 2011; Handelsman, 1986; Urofsky & Sowd, 2004; Agresti 1992; Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004), few studies have investigated the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on counselors' perceptions of their preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues (Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010; Even & Robinson, 2013).

## **Strategies and Techniques**

Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) explored literature on the pedagogy of counseling in regards to ethics training. The authors indicated that literature suggests the following strategies for teaching ethics courses to counseling students: having students identify ethical dilemmas, using problem solving strategies to respond to the identified ethical dilemmas, and a mock trial approach. The researchers concluded the article by suggesting that literature indicates that students must actively participate in their own learning and construct their own knowledge to maximize their learning experiences. While this study addressed strategies for teaching ethics courses to counseling students, it neglected to evaluate the effectiveness of any of the techniques in preparing the students to handle legal and ethical challenges. Although the current study will not examine the effectiveness of specific techniques in preparing counseling students to handle legal and ethical challenges, it will analyze the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' preparedness to respond to a variety of legal and ethical dilemmas.

Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2005) discussed their approach to teaching ethics courses to undergraduate students in the helping professions. The authors identified several pedagogical techniques they utilized when teaching ethics courses including: readings and feedback quizzes, student papers, a final examination, use of video and CD-ROM programs, role playing, and guest speakers. At the end of each course, the authors have students provide feedback on how the course was valuable in helping them acquire the necessary skills to make ethical decisions when they enter the counseling profession. The authors indicated that most students felt that the ethics course challenged them academically and personally. While this article provides techniques and strategies for

teaching an ethics course, it fails to evaluate the effectiveness of each of these strategies in properly preparing graduate students to respond to legal and ethical challenges. The present study will address this deficiency by examining the effects of graduate training programs on school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical dilemmas in their daily work.

Similarly, Jordan and Stevens (2001) explored ethics training courses for marriage and family counselors. The authors suggested that ethics courses should include the following components: clearly identified course objectives, active and engaging learning techniques, homework assignments, and a final examination. Moreover, the authors recommended that ethics courses must be systematically structured in which students begin with factual information learning and shift to practical application learning. Lastly, the authors suggest that the culminating learning experience for students occurs during their supervised clinical experiences, because they will gain on-the-job experience with legal and ethical dilemmas. Although this article provides specific strategies for teaching an ethics course and it advocates for a systematic approach to teaching an ethics course, it fails to address the effectiveness of each of the mentioned approaches on preparing students to make ethical decisions when they enter the counseling profession. The current study will fill this void by focusing on the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical challenges.

Colby and Long (1994) examined pedagogical methods that are most effective in promoting legal and ethical competence in the counseling profession. Specifically, the researchers aimed to explore how a mock trial format would facilitate graduate students'

knowledge and understanding of the complex legal and ethical challenges in the profession. The authors indicated that the objectives of a mock trial format include: becoming familiar with legal terminology and civil court proceedings, understanding the importance of case notes in counseling, developing an awareness of the role of counselors' testimony in court, understanding the application of federal and state laws and statutes, and understanding the ethical decision-making process by walking through an actual malpractice case in counseling. The authors had 92 students provide feedback on their experience with the mock trial process. The students indicated that the mock trial process was beneficial in cultivating their interest and understanding of the complex legal and ethical issues in the counseling profession. While mock trial may be an effective technique counselor educators may utilize to teach legal and ethical issues to graduate students, the researchers suggest that additional research must be conducted to determine how mock trials compare to other pedagogical techniques. Although the current study will not focus on the effects of specific pedagogical techniques, it will aim to understand the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical challenges they encounter in the profession.

### **Stand-Alone Courses and Infused Curricula**

Neukrug and Milliken (2011) studied counselors' perceptions of ethical behaviors. The study shed light on the increase in ethics courses in counselor education training programs. The study included 532 participants from the counseling profession. All of the participants indicated that they had exposure to ethics education. More specifically 59.6% of the participants had ethics infused throughout their training

programs, while 46.5% of the participants indicated that they had a stand-alone course in ethics. The authors discussed that CACREP is primarily responsible for the shift towards ethical standards being studied across the board in graduate training programs, because it is now a requirement for colleges and universities to include it in their curricula. This study also sheds light on the fact that graduate training programs are now either offering stand-alone courses in ethics or infusing ethics into their curricula; however, it fails to investigate the effectiveness of these types of training programs in preparing their graduates students. Therefore, the current study is justified because it will address this deficiency.

Handelsman (1986) suggested that ethics should not be taught through osmosis. More specifically, the author indicated that ethics training should not be solely taught while students are completing their supervised clinical experiences. The author suggested that time constraints could potentially prevent supervisors from deeply exploring ethical dilemmas with their supervisees. Additionally, the author suggested that supervisees' learning is limited to the competence of their supervisors. This means that if supervisors are unaware of ethical dilemmas and assumptions, students will miss out on valuable learning opportunities. Lastly, the author suggested that students will not be able to generalize from one situation to the next if they are only exposed to individual cases regarding legal and ethical challenges. Based on these concerns, the author suggested that ethical training should be viewed as a skill that must be developed over time. Accordingly, the author advocated for a stand-alone course in ethics to best meet the learning needs of graduate students in counselor education programs. While the author provides reasons to support the use of stand-alone courses in graduate training

programs, he fails to provide empirical evidence to support his statements. Accordingly, the present study will address this deficiency by examining the relationship between stand-alone courses and infused curricula on graduate students.

Urofsky and Sowa (2004) conducted a survey study to evaluate the content and instructional methodology of ethics courses for CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. The authors aimed to assess counselor educators' beliefs regarding ethics education. The results indicated that a majority of the programs either offer a stand-alone course in ethics (31%) or combine ethics education with legal issues as a topic (39%). Additionally, only 11% reported that they infused ethics into their curricula. In regards to counselor educators' beliefs regarding ethics education, the majority of counselor educators reported that they were supportive of mandatory ethics education for counseling students. Although this study clearly established the importance that counselor educators place on ethics training and that the majority of counselor education programs offer stand-alone courses, it fails to investigate how effective stand-alone courses are in preparing students to respond to legal and ethical issues. The present study will address this deficiency by focusing on stand-alone courses and infused curricula in graduate training programs.

Agresti (1992) discussed that older clients have unique needs which may result in complex ethical dilemmas. The author advocated for specialized ethics training to adequately prepare mental health professional to counsel older clients. Accordingly, the author supported the belief that a stand-alone course would better prepare students to handle legal and ethical dilemmas; however, the author fails to provide empirical data to support his claims. The current study will take Agresti's research a step further by

providing empirical data to advocate for either a stand-alone course or infused curriculum in preparing graduate students to handle legal and ethical challenges.

Hill (2004) studied the perceptions and practices of counselor educators who teach either a stand-alone course in ethics or infuse ethics throughout all of their courses. The researcher had 74 professors from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs participate in the study. The researcher created the Questionnaire of Philosophy and Practices in Professional Ethics Education in CACREP-Accredited Counselor Education Programs. The tool aimed to gather descriptive data from participants to identify their beliefs and practices in the following areas: materials utilized, methods of instruction, time spent in particular content areas, ethical topics for instruction, populations that are the focus for instruction, methods to evaluate student preparation, theoretical models, and ethical competence goals set for students. The results of the study indicated that all professors required students to use the ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Competence (1995), class lecture was the preferred teaching method, nearly two-thirds of the participants spent their time covering topics on ethics, and the most frequently chosen method to evaluate student preparation in ethics was a final examination. Lastly, the results indicated that the majority of participants believed that infusing ethics across courses was the most influential in preparing students for the counseling profession. Although counselor educators indicated that infused curricula were most effective in preparing their students to handle legal and ethical issues, data is needed to support their subjective opinions. The present study will aim to obtain empirical data to determine whether stand-alone courses or infused curricula better prepare school counselors' to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas.

Downs (2003) also conducted a study that supports Hills' (2004) findings that an infused curriculum better prepares counseling students to handle legal and ethical issues in the field. The results of Down's study suggested that ethical information and best practices for responding to ethical dilemmas that may occur in the field should not be limited to one stand-alone course. More specifically, the researcher suggests that CACREP should modify its counselor education program requirements to require training programs to infuse ethical training into supervision and educational theory courses. The results of the present study will either support or reject the need for infused curricula in graduate training programs.

Lambie, Hagedorn, and Ieva (2010) conducted a study that aimed to understand the effects of stand-alone ethics courses on graduate students' ethical and legal knowledge and their ability to make ethical decisions. The participants in the study included 64 masters-level counseling students enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counselor training program at a large metropolitan university in the southeastern United States. The participants were enrolled in one of two 13-week counseling ethics courses. More specifically, one course included students from the school counseling track, while the other course included students from the mental health and marriage and family tracks. The curricula for both courses covered the prominent legal and ethical issues in the counseling profession. The results indicated that there was a significant increase in participants' ethical and legal knowledge based on pretest and posttest scores. The results also indicated that the stand-alone ethics course did not have a significant impact on the participants' ethical decision-making scores. As a result of these findings, the authors suggested that students' legal and ethical knowledge may increase by



participating in a stand-alone course; however, they suggested that counselor education programs aiming to enhance students' ethical decision-making skills should infuse ethics into all of their courses. This study suggests that it is difficult to determine whether a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum best prepares students to handle legal and ethical issues. Therefore, the findings of this study provides a firm rationale for the current study by helping to close the gap in literature surrounding ethics curriculum structure and school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical dilemmas.

Even and Robinson (2013) explored the difference between graduates of CACREP-accredited and non-CACREP accredited graduate training programs on ethical misconduct among counselors. Additionally, the researchers also aimed to explore the role of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on ethical misconduct as evidenced by the frequency and types of ethical violations among counselors. The researchers utilized a multi-way frequency analysis to analyze their data. The results indicated that graduates of CACREP-accredited programs are less likely to face ethical misconduct sanctions compared to graduates of non-CACREP accredited programs. Moreover, the results suggested that there were no significant differences in frequency of ethics violations among those that had stand-alone courses and those that had ethics and legal issues infused in their curriculum. To date, this is the only study that specifically addresses the effects of graduate training programs on ethical behaviors of counselors. This study supports the need for further research on this topic, especially the role of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. The present study aspired to close the gap in this area.

As one considers the need to address the role of counselor educators in preparing school counselors to respond to legal and ethical issues, the standards and competencies set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) should be taken into account. This organization established a set of standards that will, “ensure that students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills to practice effectively (CACREP, 2009). The standards that counselor educators must ensure their students master include:

- G.1j. Ethical standards of professional organizations and credentialing bodies, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling

Additionally, as one considers the need to address the role of counselor educators in preparing school counselors to handle legal and ethical issues, the standards set forth by the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics should be taken into account. This organization established a code of ethics that, “sets forth the ethical obligations of ACA members and provides guidance intended to inform the ethical practice of professional counselors” (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014). The ACA Code of Ethics speaks directly to the responsibility of counselor educators, by including the following standard in its Code of Ethics:

- F.7.e. Teaching Ethics: Throughout the program, counselor educators ensure that students are aware of the ethical responsibilities and standards of the profession and the ethical responsibilities of students to the profession. Counselor educators infuse ethical considerations throughout the curriculum

The requirements specific to legal and ethical training within CACREP and ACA's standards demonstrate the clear need for a better understanding of school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. CACREP and ACA should also consider the ability of counselor educators to comply with these standards if graduates do not feel prepared to respond to legal and ethical issues. There are few studies that address the effects of graduates training programs on school counselors' preparedness to manage legal and ethical issues. Hence, the current study was justified in its examination of the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues.

Research presents support for the increasing need for school counselors to be adequately trained to handle legal and ethical issues to avoid legal vulnerability. Furthermore, current research is beginning to show an interest in the area of examining the role of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. While there is a significant need to research this topic to ensure that school counselors are receiving appropriate training, there remains a large gap in the literature as to how stand-alone courses and infused curricula play into school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues in their daily work. The researcher aimed to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical challenges with the hopes that current research can move beyond the types of legal and ethical issues school counselors encounter in their profession and toward the ways graduate training programs may be affecting their preparedness to effectively manage legal and ethical issues.

## **Precedence in Demographic Data**

### **Defining Stand-Alone Course and Infused Curriculum**

In determining a definition for stand-alone courses and infused curricula of graduate training programs for the current study, the researcher attempted to ascertain a clear understanding of how current research defines stand-alone courses and infused curricula. Limited research was found that defined these variables. Various research studies have been conducted in order to examine counselor education training programs; however, none provide specific definitions of stand-alone courses and infused curricula.

While most studies have provided no specific parameters for defining stand-alone courses and infused curricula, others have been able to provide a minimal definition for defining each of these variables. Even and Robinson (2014) aimed to explore the role of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on ethical misconduct as evidenced by the frequency and types of ethical violations among counselors. The authors used the term “integrated” to define infused curricula. Additionally, the authors used the terms “formal” and “isolated” interchangeably to define stand-alone courses.

For the purposes of this study, stand-alone course will be defined as isolated, formal, or separate legal and ethics course taken by school counselors during their graduate training program. Additionally, infused curriculum will refer to graduate training programs that integrate ethics education into the counselor training curriculum.

### **Defining Years of Experience**

The researcher attempted to gain a clear understanding of how current literature defines new and veteran school counselors; however, none of studies provide an exact definition of new or veteran school counselors or the years of experience related to each

group. Walsh, Barrett, and DePaul (2007) conducted a qualitative study that examined whether newly hired school counselors would integrate the ASCA National Model into their school counseling programs. The respondents' levels of experience as school counselors ranged from one to five years. Studer and Oberman (2006) conducted a study to examine the training school counseling students received on the ASCA National Model during their supervision experience. For this study, the researchers grouped the participants into two categories: (1) six or less years of experience, and (2) seven or more years of experience. Hermann, Leggett, and Remley (2008) investigated legal issues that counselors face in their daily work. The researchers put the participants into the following groups: (1) four or less years of experience, (2) four to seven years of experience, (3) eight to twelve years of experience, and (4) twelve or more years of experience. While these studies have broken down years of experience into similar categories, they did not provide justification or a rationale for their decision.

For the present study, the researcher will differentiate new school counselors from veteran school counselors based on years of experience. Since there is minimal research related to defining the differences in years of experience between these two groups, the researcher opted to define the breakdown of respondents' years of experience as the following: five or less years of experience as a school counselor and six or more years of experience as a school counselor. Accordingly, new school counselors will have five or less years of experience and veteran school counselors will have six or more years of experience.

## Summary

While a review of existing literature reflected the growing need for legal and ethical training for school counselors, it failed to inform the reader of school counselors' perceptions of their preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues in their daily work. The need for legal and ethical training in counseling is clear and grows as the profession continues to grow as well. As school counselors become increasingly susceptible to legal vulnerability, it has become necessary to obtain adequate legal and ethical training during their counselor education programs. The types of legal issues encountered by school counselors, the perceptions and attitudes towards legal and ethical issues, ethical training strategies and techniques, and the format of counselor education training programs are variables that have been measured in various studies. However, only one study in previously mentioned literature provides a glimpse into the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical challenges in the profession. Beyond this study, there are no existing studies found by the researcher that encompass the topic of graduate training programs as they relate to school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues.

There lies a large gap in the literature in regards to school counselor preparedness to respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. The utilization of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale has had little use by the profession as it has only recently been developed to respond to the growing need to evaluate school counselors' preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. Studies utilizing such a scale with school counselors may yield a wealth of information about school counselors' preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. The intent of the current study was to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors'

preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues. The purpose of this study was to begin to present research that speaks of school counselors' actual perceptions of their preparedness in relation to their ethics curriculum structure rather than just the insistence that they frequently encounter a variety of legal and ethical dilemmas in their daily work. The results of this study may provide a much needed preview of how counselor educators can provide training to graduate students as a means for increasing their perceptions of preparedness to respond to legal and ethical issues as they enter the counseling profession. The literature reviewed in the previous and current chapter substantiate the absence of studies related to the topic of the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to handle legal and ethical dilemmas. Therefore, conducting a research study in this area was justified.

The following chapter will discuss the research design and methodology used for the current study. Chapter Four will explain the results of the study. Chapter Five will offer a discussion of the findings as well as implications to inform future research.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the present chapter will be to explain how the researcher intends to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. Accordingly, the chapter will include sections on the current study's research design and approach, the setting and sample, information regarding the instrumentation and materials that will be employed within the study, the data collection and analysis process, and protective measures utilized for the participants. The chapter will conclude with a summary and brief overview of the remaining chapters of the study.

#### **Research Design and Approach**

For the present study, the researcher utilized a quantitative approach. The study was non-experimental and compared groups of middle school counselors. A causal-comparative study was completed in order to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. A comparison of these groups may provide insight into school counselors' preparedness or lack thereof with handling legal and ethical challenges in their daily work. One of the key components of causal-comparative research is the comparison of existing groups; therefore, the implementation of this type of research was appropriate for the present study. The researcher did not manipulate any variables, which also substantiates the applications of a causal-comparative design



for the present study. Since there are similarities between the present study and the components of a casual-comparative design, the use of this type of design was justified.

There are several scholarly books that discuss research as it relates to the field of education (Orcher, 2005; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). These books specifically address the topics of causal-comparative research and the key components of this type of research design. Since causal-comparative research describes conditions that already exist, it can be considered a genre of descriptive research. Researchers are aiming to ascertain the rationale for discrepancies between groups. This genre of research analyzes two or more groups and one independent variable. Causal-comparative research designs do not involve random assignment of participants to groups because they were chosen to be in groups prior to the start of the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Fraenkel & Warren, 2006). Since independent variables have already occurred, they are not manipulated in this type of research design. A possible weakness of a casual-comparative research design is that groups are not randomized, which could potentially lead to inequalities between groups. Causal-comparative research offers a framework from which the researcher can gain insight into potential differences between groups of middle school counselors in their preparedness to handle legal and ethical dilemmas. This may act as a springboard towards closing the gap in the limited amount of research on this topic.

The present study could also be considered employing a qualitative approach. The researcher could opt to interview a small number of middle school counselors to shed light on their reasoning for having or lacking preparedness with legal and ethical dilemmas. The researcher could choose to utilize focus groups and one-on-one

interviews with the participants in the study. Data collection and analysis could involve coding the participants' responses and identifying salient themes based on their responses. While a qualitative approach would have provided a snapshot into the perceptions of school counselors who had a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum on legal and ethical issues in the counseling field, it would not have been possible for the researcher to assume the perceptions of these counselors in comparison to one another. Although these results would not be generalizable to the general population of middle school counselors, light would be shed on understanding the participants' reasoning for their preparedness or lack of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While there are advantages to completing this study by utilizing a qualitative framework, the scope of a qualitative study is too limited for the information to be gained by the present study. A quantitative approach would make it feasible for the researcher to obtain information from a wide range of participants. Moreover, it would enable the findings to be more generalizable and conclusive. In an effort to act as a change agent within the school counseling profession and graduate training programs, the view of several school counselors must be shared with others. The present study will act as an impetus towards sharing the numerous views of school counselors. Although the current study is on a smaller scale, it will still yield a larger representation than that of a qualitative study with just a few participants.

## **Settings and Sample**

### **Population**

The targeted population for the present study included practicing middle school counselors within the state of South Carolina. These school counselors were those

employed in public school settings with students in grades six through eight. The demographics of the prospective participants varied in ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), gender, years of experience (five or less and six or more), highest degree earned, and work setting (urban, suburban, and rural). The prospective participants were located from within most, if not all, the school districts in South Carolina.

### **Sampling Method**

Research participants were obtained from a stratified sampling. This sampling method was appropriate for the current study because the researcher grouped members of the population into relatively homogenous subgroups before sampling (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). More specifically, the researcher obtained prospective participants from all middle schools in South Carolina that agreed to participate in the study and put them into subgroups based on ethics curriculum structure. (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). This sampling method was advantageous because it allowed to researcher to obtain a more representative sample for the study.

### **Sample Size**

The researcher conducted an a priori power analysis to determine the sample size needed for generalizability ( Balkin and Sheperis, 2011). In completing an a priori power analysis to determine target sample size, the researcher utilized the G\*Power analysis software to calculate target sample size for the present study. The input parameters for the a priori power analysis were a medium effect size (0.15), an alpha/error of probability of 0.05, and the desired power was set at 0.80. The a priori power analysis indicated that

the researcher needed a minimum of 46 participants for the findings to be generalizable to middle school counselors in South Carolina.

There are currently 200 middle schools in South Carolina serving students in grades six through eight. The approximate number of middle school counselors in South Carolina is 456. The researcher requested participation from all middle school counselors in South Carolina via the listserv for school counselors offered by the South Carolina Department of Education and the online directory provided by the Palmetto State School Counselor Association. While approximately 107 middle school counselors are listed on the Palmetto State School Counselor Association online directory, it is unknown how many middle school counselors subscribe to the listserv provided by the South Carolina Department of Education. A total of 80 (17.5%) middle school counselors completed the entire electronic survey for this study. This number yielded the researcher enough data for the results to be generalizable to middle school counselors in South Carolina.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

The eligibility criteria for study participation required participants to be presently employed as a school counselor in a public school setting in a middle school. For the purposes of the current study, a middle school counselor included those serving students in grades six through eight. Data received from any respondents not meeting these criterion were excluded from the study.

### **Characteristics of Sample**

South Carolina currently houses 88 school districts and 1,260 public schools (South Carolina Department of Education, 2014). There are 200 middle schools that

meet the criteria of serving students in grades six through eight. Although there are different leveling criteria for the state of South Carolina, the researcher considered middle schools that serve students in grades six through eight for the present study. All geographic areas were considered for the sample, including rural, suburban, and urban settings. The researcher requested that both male and female school counselors participate in the study. Gender was classified as male and female. The current study differentiated between two levels of years of experience in the sample—those with five or less years of experience and those with six or more years of experience. The researcher requested that participants with various education levels in school counseling participate in the study, including those with a master’s degree, educational specialist degree, and doctorate degree. The present study differentiated between ethics curriculum structure in the sample—those who had a stand-alone course and those that had an infused curriculum on legal and ethical issues.

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

In considering how to survey participants regarding their confidence, knowledge, and/or preparedness regarding legal and ethical issues, researchers have designed various surveys to examine them (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997; Remley & Huey, 2002; Hermann, 2002; Mullen, Lambie, & Conley, 2014). While some of these surveys have been examined to test their validity, others have been designed by researchers without any testing measures to determine if the surveys are valid.

Researchers have created scales to measure varying areas of individuals’ attitudes and perceptions about preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues, such as the Legal Issues in Counseling Survey created by Hermann and the Ethical and Legal Issues in

Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES) created by Mullen, Lambie, and Conley. The ELICSES contains a list of various legal and ethical issues that regularly confront counselors in their daily work, and it asks counselors to rate how confident they are in their ability to address the specified legal and ethical issues.

The Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale was developed in response to a lack of available instruments that can be utilized to study and evaluate issues related to ethical and legal challenges in counseling and counselor education. Prior to the development of this instrument, there were only a few instruments that measured ethical and legal constructs in counselors. Additionally, there were no instruments that measured self-efficacy regarding legal and ethical challenges in the field of counseling. The researchers defined self-efficacy as, “the extent to which an individual feels able to complete a task, activity, or reach a goal.” Accordingly, the ELICSES contributes to the literature and counseling profession by providing an assessment tool for evaluating counselors’ self-efficacy regarding ethical and legal dilemmas.

While the ELICSES has contributed to the literature and counseling profession by providing a much needed assessment tool, it has only been utilized to check for its reliability and validity throughout the development process. Limited research exists that measures school counselors’ responses to legal and ethical dilemmas in terms of attitudes, perceptions, and preparedness. The researcher found no existing studies that measure school counselors’ preparedness to handle legal and ethical challenges by utilizing the ELICSES, which is likely because it was just recently created and published in January of 2014. No studies were found that focused on the population of middle school counselors’ preparedness with handling legal and ethical dilemmas. Therefore,

the current study completed a survey with middle school counselors that had a stand-alone course or infused curriculum on ethics and legal issues by utilizing the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale by Mullen, Lambie, and Conley as a means for examining their levels of preparedness in responding to legal and ethical challenges.

The Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale is a 23 item survey consisting of a Likert-type scale with three anchors (Cannot Do At All, Moderately Certain Can Do, and Highly Certain Can Do). In addition to an overall score, the ELICSES consists of three subscales including: (1) general ethical and legal issues self-efficacy; (2) suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy, and (3) counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. The current study will compare two groups of middle school counselors (those who had a stand-alone course and those who had an infused curriculum). The ELICSES is composed of eleven possible responses, which range from (0) Cannot Do At All at one end to (100) Highly Certain Can Do at the other end. More specifically, participants have the following options for rating their degree of confidence for each ethical/legal issues: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100—which results in eleven possible options for participants to select from for their degree of confidence with each ethical/legal issue. The responses follow a logical sequence and will be assigned a numerical score to each response (from 0 to 100). Based on a study by Mullen, Lambie, and Conley (2014), it is recommended that researchers calculate a score for subscales two and three and a total score. Accordingly, an overall score and a score for subscales two and three will be calculated for this study, along with the mean and standard deviation for each area. Scores that range from 0-20 indicate that the school

counselor is not prepared to handle legal/ethical issues, scores that range from 30-70 indicate that the school counselor is moderately prepared to handle legal/ethical issues, and scores that range from 80-100 indicate that the school counselor feels prepared to handle legal/ethical issues.

Mullen, Lambie, and Conley conducted a study that assessed the reliability and validity of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the study indicated that there was a Cronbach's alpha of .96, which suggests that there is strong internal consistency reliability (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the construct validity of the ELICSES. The results indicated that the validity of the ELICSES was found to be acceptable with a KMO measure of sampling adequacy at 0.97. Lastly, Mullen et al. (2014) measured the social desirability of the participants by using the MCSDS-X1, and the results indicated that there was a medium correlation between overall score on the ELICSES and social desirability.

In addition to completing the ELICSES, participants were asked to complete a demographic data questionnaire. Demographic data collection included information regarding participants' gender, years of experience working as a school counselor, highest degree earned, work setting, and ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course or infused curriculum on ethical and legal issues). Participants were asked to disclose the grade levels in their current work setting in order to eliminate any respondents who did not meet the criteria for working in a school serving students in grades six through eight. The researcher identified the colleges and universities that offer a stand-alone course in legal and ethical issues and those that infuse legal and ethical issues into their curriculum.



The researcher found that The University of South Carolina and Winthrop University offer a stand-alone course in legal and ethical issues related to school counseling. Alternatively, the Citadel, South Carolina State University, and Clemson University infuse ethical and legal issues into their school counseling curriculum. Accordingly, participants were asked to disclose the college or university that they earned their school counseling degree from to identify respondents that took a stand-alone course or had an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues related to school counseling.

In order to complete the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and demographic data collection, participants needed to have access to the internet. Additionally, participants needed to either be signed up to receive emails from the school counseling listserv from the South Carolina Department of Education or they needed to be members of the Palmetto State School Counselor Association. The survey was emailed from the school counseling listserv provided by the South Carolina Department of Education, and it was emailed out to members of the Palmetto State School Counselor Association through the online directory. Along with the survey, there was an explanation of the study and instructions for completing the survey. Each participant needed to have the time to read and complete the survey, which took approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

### **Threats to Internal and External Validity**

History and maturation did not affect internal validity for two reasons: (1) the time window was not long, and (2) the participants' were not attempting to improve on anything. Since the power analysis indicated that the number of responses yielded

provided enough data to detect a significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure, the results were generalizable to middle school counselors in South Carolina.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection procedures used by the researcher consisted of a twenty-three question survey. The survey was emailed from the school counseling listserv provided by the South Carolina Department of Education, and it was emailed to members of the Palmetto State School Counselor Association through the online directory. Along with the survey, there was a statement of approval from the IRB, an explanation of the study, and instructions for completing the survey. In addition to the 23 question survey, participants were asked to complete a demographic section asking their graduate program training (to determine ethics curriculum structure), gender, years of experience, highest degree earned, grade levels they currently serve, and work setting (urban, suburban, and rural).

### **Data Analysis**

The present study employed the SPSS statistical software system in order to run a descriptive analysis to answer the research question. All of the variables were studied and the findings were reported. Once the completed surveys were received from the participants, a 3-way MANOVA was conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. The utilization of a 3-way MANOVA was justified in the present study as the researcher assessed the main and interaction effects for subscale two, subscale three, and the total score on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). More specifically, since the researcher examined multiple related dependent variables

(subscale 2, subscale 3, and total score), a 3-way MANOVA was first run through SPSS for each hypothesis to account for all of the dependent variables simultaneously and adjust for the risk of a Type 1 Error. Furthermore, a 3-way MANOVA was appropriate for the present study as the researcher examined the main and interaction effects of three variables (gender, years of experience, highest degree earned, work setting, and ethics curriculum structures) in each hypothesis. Since each hypothesis speaks to the dependent variables separately, an ANOVA was then conducted for each hypothesis to determine which specific dependent variable contributed to a significant overall effect.

The assumptions that must be met for a MANOVA are independence, normality, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of covariance (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). A Shapiro-Wilk was conducted to check for normality, a Levene test was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance, and a Box's Test was conducted to check for homogeneity of covariance. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for each variable. The calculations disclosed how middle school counselors responded to the survey items.

The present study aimed to answer the following research question: What effect do stand-alone courses and infused curricula have on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical issues? While investigating these differences, consideration was given to the following hypotheses from the subscales and overall scores of the Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale:

1. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for

- years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
2. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  3. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  4. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  5. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale

6. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
7. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
8. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
9. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
10. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor

- development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
11. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  12. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  13. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
  14. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale

15. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
16. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
17. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale
18. There will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale

The current study will use a 3-way MANOVA to compare the means of the groups of middle school counselors and their preparedness with legal and ethical issues (Agresti and Finlay, 2009). The dependent variables for this study were the following:

(1) total scores, (2) subscale two scores, and (3) subscale three scores. The independent variables for this study were the following: (1) ethics curriculum structure, (2) years of experience, (3) work setting, (4) gender, and (5) highest degree earned. A 3-way MANOVA was justified for the present study because the researcher aimed to determine if differences existed between the two groups on perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Additionally, a 3-way MANOVA was appropriate because the study included multiple related dependent variables.

### **Participants' Rights**

#### **Protective Measures**

Prospective participants for the present study were invited to participate in an electronic survey. The electronic survey included a letter of consent and participants had the opportunity to accept or decline participation without undue influence. Participants were considered to give their consent by completing the survey. Any non-respondents were considered to have declined participation in the study. In an effort to decrease any risk of undue influence, the survey did not include any identifiable information for any participants. The demographics section did not request any identifiable information from the participants. Accordingly, the researcher did not have any knowledge of which prospective participants completed the survey. There was no possibility for the researcher to link participants' identities with any completed surveys.

#### **Risks and Benefits/IRB**

Due to the method of data collection, it was not expected that the participants experienced any risks. The nature of the survey did not pose any major risks to the participants. Aside from the time and energy to complete the survey, possible discomforts to participants were minimal. In an effort to minimize risks, the participants



did not provide any identifiable information. Before the present study began, an application was submitted to the University of South Carolina review board. The letter of invitation to participate in the study included a statement of approval from the IRB. Although the study did not provide compensation to its participants, the possible benefits from the present study included the opportunity for practicing school counselors to provide their thoughts and feelings regarding their preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues. The information gleaned from this study aimed to serve as the initial basis for demonstrating the need for pedagogical and curricular changes in graduate training programs in South Carolina.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. The causal-comparative design of the study was justified as this study intended to compare existing groups of middle school counselors. The sample anticipated gaining information from an array of middle school counselors in South Carolina who are employed in a sixth through eighth grade public school setting. The researcher emailed the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and Demographic Data Questionnaire to prospective participants along with a letter of consent via the school counseling listserv provided by the South Carolina Department of Education, and the researcher emailed the survey to prospective participants through the Palmetto State School Counselor Association's online directory. Data received through the present study was analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics.

The following chapter will present an overview of the finding of the study, and the final chapter will discuss the implications of this study regarding future research for school counselors and graduate training programs.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The intent of the current study was to examine the effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' self-described preparedness to effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas. A data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Statistical analyses were conducted to test all hypotheses. In an effort to organize the findings, this chapter will present a descriptive sample analysis and a statistical analysis of each of the research hypotheses examined in the study.

#### **Sample Analysis**

Participants for the current study were drawn from a stratified sample consisting of middle school counselors in the state of South Carolina. The electronic surveys were emailed to potential participants via the South Carolina Department of Education's school counseling listserv and the online directory provided by the Palmetto State School Counselor Association. A total of 156 school counselors in South Carolina took the electronic survey; however, 38 participants only completed page one of the survey, which was the demographic data questionnaire. Therefore, after preliminary results of the data analysis were assessed for missing data, a total of 118 participants completed the entire survey. While 118 participants completed the survey, a total of 80 fit the criteria for middle school counselor. Based on the a priori power analysis, the target sample for this

study was 46 participants. The final sample size for this study was 80 participants; accordingly, the results of this study may be generalizable to other middle school counselors in South Carolina. Frequency tables were utilized for analyzing demographic variables.

### **Demographics**

Participants of the current study were current middle school counselors in South Carolina. The analyses included data from 80 participants. As shown in Table 4.1, 88.8% of the participants identified themselves as female, while the remaining 11.3% identified themselves as male.

*Table 4.1 Frequencies of Participants by Gender*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	9	11.3	11.3	11.3
	Female	71	88.8	88.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Years of experience were categorized into those participants with five or less years of experience and those with six or more years of experience. The data indicated that 30.0% of the participants reported having five or less years of experience, while 70.0% reported having six or more years of experience as a professional school counselor (See Table. 4.2).

*Table 4.2 Frequencies of Participants by Years of Experience*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5 or less	24	30.0	30.0	30.0
	6 or more	56	70.0	70.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

As illustrated in Table 4.3, study participants reported their highest degree earned. Participants reported having either a Masters degree, Educational Specialist degree, or doctoral degree. According to the responses, 55.0% reported earning a master’s degree, while 30.0% stated an educational specialist degree as their highest degree earned. A smaller percentage (15.0%) reported a Doctorate degree as their highest degree earned.

*Table 4.3 Frequencies of Participants by Highest Degree Earned*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Masters	44	55.0	55.0	55.0
	EdS	24	30.0	30.0	85.0
	PhD	12	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In describing their current work setting, participants selected from the following choices: rural, urban, or suburban. As shown in Table 4.4, 43.8% of middle school counselor respondents reported working in a rural setting. While 40.0% of participants reported working in a suburban setting, only 16.3% reported working in an urban work setting.

*Table 4.4 Frequencies of Participants by Work Setting*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rural	35	43.8	43.8	43.8
	Urban	13	16.3	16.3	60.0
	Suburban	32	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In answering the demographic data question regarding ethics curriculum structure, participants selected the college or university from which they earned their school

counseling degree. If participants indicated that they received their degree from outside of the state of South Carolina, they were asked to provide the name of the college or university. For those responses that listed a college or university located outside of the state of South Carolina, the researcher went to their website to determine if they had a stand-alone course or infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. As illustrated in Table 4.5, 53.8% of participants had a stand-alone course, while 46.3% of participants had an infused curriculum.

*Table 4.5 Frequencies of Participants by Ethics Curriculum Structure*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Stand-Alone	43	53.8	53.8	53.8
	Infused	37	46.3	46.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

### **Research Hypotheses Analysis**

The Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (Mullen, Lambie, and Conley, 2014) and demographic data questionnaire were utilized to analyze the variables in the current study. These questions were all compiled into one survey and administered via electronic format. A total score, subscale two score, and subscale three score were collected for the data analysis.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted for this study. Independence was assumed because there were two independent groups. As illustrated in Table 4.6, the Shapiro-Wilk indicated a p-value of .000 for subscales two and three, and there was a p-value of .006 for the total score. Since the p-values were not greater than .05, the normality assumption was violated for this study. MANOVAs are robust to normality, so

the assumption can be violated without serious error being introduced to the test (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). The Box's Test and Levene Test indicated that the assumptions were met for all of the hypotheses except for those that included work setting as a variable. In response to these violations, Pillai's Trace was used for the overall analysis.

*Table 4.6 Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality*

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Subscale2	.901	80	.000
Subscale3	.931	80	.000
Totalscore	.954	80	.006

The alpha reliability for participants in the present study was 0.924. Since the Cronbach's alpha value was above 0.7, the reliability was acceptable for the current study.

The researcher also evaluated the data for outliers and missing data. The analysis indicated that there were no outliers for the present study. In regards to missing data, the electronic survey was two pages. More specifically, once participants completed page one (demographic data questionnaire), they could proceed to page two (Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale) of the survey. From the 156 participants that took the survey, approximately 38 only completed page one; therefore, these participants were excluded from the study. All of the questions for page two of the survey were marked as mandatory; accordingly, there was no missing data from the remaining 118 participants' surveys. From the 118 remaining participants, only 80 fit the criteria for middle school counselor; therefore, 80 participants were included in the study.

A 3-way MANOVA was conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of stand-alone courses and infused curricula on middle school counselors' preparedness to

effectively respond to legal and ethical dilemmas for each of the hypotheses. For the total score, subscale two score, and subscale three score, predictors were tested for both main and interaction effects with a level of statistical significance set at .05 for all analyses. Since each hypothesis speaks to the dependent variables separately, an ANOVA/Between-Subjects/Effects Test was then conducted for each hypothesis to determine which specific dependent variables (subscale two, subscale three, and total score) contributed to a significant overall effect.

### **Hypothesis One**

Hypothesis One stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and work setting on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.7). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.846$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.243$ ) or work setting ( $p=.396$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.223$ ).



Table 4.7 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis		Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
				df	Error df		
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.059	1.427	3.000	68.000	.243	.059
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.087	1.051	6.000	138.000	.396	.044
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.012	.272	3.000	68.000	.846	.012
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.114	1.389	6.000	138.000	.223	.057

Table 4.8 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.742$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.137$ ) or work setting ( $p=.751$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.136$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis One was not supported.

Table 4.8 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale2	192.524	1	192.524	2.267	.137	.031
Work Setting	Subscale2	48.852	2	24.426	.288	.751	.008
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	9.273	1	9.273	.109	.742	.002
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Subscale2	348.727	2	174.364	2.053	.136	.055

## Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Two stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and gender on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.9). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.738$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.822$ ) or gender ( $p=.688$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.117$ ).

*Table 4.9 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.013	.304	3.000	71.000	.822	.013
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.018	.422	3.000	71.000	.738	.018
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.020	.493	3.000	71.000	.688	.020
Years of Experience & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.079	2.031	3.000	71.000	.117	.079

Table 4.10 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results

indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.829$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.426$ ) or gender ( $p=.394$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.080$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Two was not supported.

*Table 4.10 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale2	58.169	1	58.169	.641	.426	.009
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	4.274	1	4.274	.047	.829	.001
Gender	Subscale2	66.793	1	66.793	.736	.394	.010
Years of Experience & Gender	Subscale2	285.679	1	285.679	3.146	.080	.041

### **Hypothesis Three**

Hypothesis Three stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.11). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.824$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.781$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.137$ ). The results

indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned (p=.606).

*Table 4.11 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.016	.361	3.000	68.000	.781	.016
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.013	.301	3.000	68.000	.824	.013
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.134	1.655	6.000	138.000	.137	.067
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.064	.756	6.000	138.000	.606	.032

Table 4.12 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure (p=.414). There was no main effect for years of experience (p=.881) or highest degree earned (p=.054). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned (p=.638). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Three was not supported.

*Table 4.12 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale2	1.995	1	1.995	.022	.881	.000
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	60.230	1	60.230	.676	.414	.010
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale2	541.184	2	270.592	3.039	.054	.080
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Subscale2	80.648	2	40.324	.453	.638	.013

#### **Hypothesis Four**

Hypothesis Four stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and gender on the ELICES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.13). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.940$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.256$ ) or gender ( $p=.485$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.184$ ).

Table 4.13 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis		Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
				df	Error df		
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.006	.134	3.000	68.000	.940	.006
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.108	1.312	6.000	138.000	.256	.054
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.035	.825	3.000	68.000	.485	.035
Work Setting & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.122	1.497	6.000	138.000	.184	.061

Table 4.14 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.869$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.430$ ) or gender ( $p=.466$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.258$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Four was not supported.

Table 4.14 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
		Sum of Squares					
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	2.393	1	2.393	.027	.869	.000
Work Setting	Subscale2	148.658	2	74.329	.853	.430	.024
Gender	Subscale2	46.882	1	46.882	.538	.466	.008
Work Setting & Gender	Subscale2	240.559	2	120.279	1.380	.258	.038

## Hypothesis Five

Hypothesis Five stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.15). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.556$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.795$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.212$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.653$ ).

*Table 4.15 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis		Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
				df	Error df		
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.032	.700	3.000	64.000	.556	.032
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.047	.516	6.000	130.000	.795	.023
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.123	1.420	6.000	130.000	.212	.061
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.138	.797	12.000	198.000	.653	.046

Table 4.16 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results

indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.442$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.936$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.056$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.316$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Five was not supported.

*Table 4.16 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	49.336	1	49.336	.597	.442	.009
Work Setting	Subscale2	10.882	2	5.441	.066	.936	.002
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale2	498.475	2	249.238	3.016	.056	.084
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Subscale2	399.001	4	99.750	1.207	.316	.068

### **Hypothesis Six**

Hypothesis Six stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, gender, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.17). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect



due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.684$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.274$ ); however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.069$ ).

*Table 4.17 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.022	.499	3.000	68.000	.684	.022
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.183	2.317	6.000	138.000	.037	.092
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.055	1.325	3.000	68.000	.274	.055
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.160	2.005	6.000	138.000	.069	.080

Table 4.18 presents results from the subscale two scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.670$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.702$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.403$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.898$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure and a main effect for highest degree earned, Hypothesis Six was not supported.

*Table 4.18 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Two Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale2	16.525	1	16.525	.183	.670	.003
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale2	166.300	2	83.150	.922	.403	.026
Gender	Subscale2	13.352	1	13.352	.148	.702	.002
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Subscale2	19.408	2	9.704	.108	.898	.003

### **Hypothesis Seven**

Hypothesis Seven stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and work setting on the ELICES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.19). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.846$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.243$ ) or work setting ( $p=.396$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.223$ ).

Table 4.19 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.059	1.427	3.000	68.000	.243	.059
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.087	1.051	6.000	138.000	.396	.044
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.012	.272	3.000	68.000	.846	.012
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.114	1.389	6.000	138.000	.223	.057

Table 4.20 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.415$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.860$ ) or work setting ( $p=.090$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.746$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Seven was not supported.

*Table 4.20 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale3	4.526	1	4.526	.031	.860	.000
Work Setting	Subscale3	722.367	2	361.183	2.490	.090	.066
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale3	97.650	1	97.650	.673	.415	.010
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Subscale3	85.229	2	42.615	.294	.746	.008

### **Hypothesis Eight**

Hypothesis Eight stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and gender on the ELICES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.21). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.738$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.822$ ) or gender ( $p=.688$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.117$ ).

Table 4.21 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.013	.304	3.000	71.000	.822	.013
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.018	.422	3.000	71.000	.738	.018
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.020	.493	3.000	71.000	.688	.020
Years of Experience & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.079	2.031	3.000	71.000	.117	.079

Table 4.22 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.530$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.982$ ) or gender ( $p=.732$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.967$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Eight was not supported.

Table 4.22 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale3	.085	1	.085	.000	.982	.000
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale3	68.728	1	68.728	.398	.530	.005
Gender	Subscale3	20.401	1	20.401	.118	.732	.002
Years of Experience & Gender	Subscale3	.298	1	.298	.002	.967	.000

## Hypothesis Nine

Hypothesis Nine stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.23). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.824$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.781$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.137$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned ( $p=.606$ ).

*Table 4.23 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.016	.361	3.000	68.000	.781	.016
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.013	.301	3.000	68.000	.824	.013
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.134	1.655	6.000	138.000	.137	.067
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.064	.756	6.000	138.000	.606	.032

Table 4.24 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.934$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.357$ ); however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.047$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned ( $p=.173$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure and a main effect for highest degree earned, Hypothesis Nine was not supported.

*Table 4.24 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Subscale3	129.731	1	129.731	.860	.357	.012
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale3	1.046	1	1.046	.007	.934	.000
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale3	962.870	2	481.435	3.193	.047	.084
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Subscale3	542.107	2	271.054	1.798	.173	.049

### **Hypothesis Ten**

Hypothesis Ten stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any

main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and gender on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.25). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.940$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.256$ ) or gender ( $p=.485$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.184$ ).

*Table 4.25 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.006	.134	3.000	68.000	.940	.006
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.108	1.312	6.000	138.000	.256	.054
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.035	.825	3.000	68.000	.485	.035
Work Setting & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.122	1.497	6.000	138.000	.184	.061

Table 4.26 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.629$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.077$ ) or gender ( $p=.650$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.240$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Ten was not supported.



*Table 4.26 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
<b>Ethics Curriculum Structure</b>							
	Subscale3	32.800	1	32.800	.235	.629	.003
<b>Work Setting</b>							
	Subscale3	742.887	2	371.444	2.665	.077	.071
<b>Gender</b>							
	Subscale3	28.997	1	28.997	.208	.650	.003
<b>Work Setting &amp; Gender</b>							
	Subscale3	406.322	2	203.161	1.458	.240	.040

### **Hypothesis Eleven**

Hypothesis Eleven stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.27). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.556$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.795$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.212$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.653$ ).

Table 4.27 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.032	.700	3.000	64.000	.556	.032
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.047	.516	6.000	130.000	.795	.023
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.123	1.420	6.000	130.000	.212	.061
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.138	.797	12.000	198.000	.653	.046

Table 4.28 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.163$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.512$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.753$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.420$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Eleven was not supported.

*Table 4.28 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale3	264.457	1	264.457	1.994	.163	.029
Work Setting	Subscale3	179.285	2	89.642	.676	.512	.020
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale3	75.570	2	37.785	.285	.753	.009
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Subscale3	524.912	4	131.228	.989	.420	.057

### **Hypothesis Twelve**

Hypothesis Twelve stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, gender, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.29). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.684$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.274$ ); however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.069$ ).

Table 4.29 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.022	.499	3.000	68.000	.684	.022
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.183	2.317	6.000	138.000	.037	.092
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.055	1.325	3.000	68.000	.274	.055
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.160	2.005	6.000	138.000	.069	.080

Table 4.30 presents results from the subscale three scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.230$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.213$ ); however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.012$ ). The results indicated an interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.032$ ). Due to a lack of main effect for ethics curriculum structure, a main effect for highest degree earned, and an interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned, Hypothesis Twelve was not supported.

Table 4.30 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Subscale Three Main and Interaction Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Subscale3	211.166	1	211.166	1.467	.230	.021
Highest Degree Earned	Subscale3	1349.998	2	674.999	4.688	.012	.118
Gender	Subscale3	227.783	1	227.783	1.582	.213	.022
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Subscale3	1041.646	2	520.823	3.617	.032	.094

### Hypothesis Thirteen

Hypothesis Thirteen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and work setting on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.31). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.846$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.243$ ) or work setting ( $p=.396$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.223$ ).

*Table 4.31 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.059	1.427	3.000	68.000	.243	.059
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.087	1.051	6.000	138.000	.396	.044
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.012	.272	3.000	68.000	.846	.012
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.114	1.389	6.000	138.000	.223	.057

Table 4.32 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated

no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.793$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.168$ ) or work setting ( $p=.444$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and work setting ( $p=.632$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Thirteen was not supported.

*Table 4.32 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Totalscore	197.451	1	197.451	1.938	.168	.027
Work Setting	Totalscore	167.541	2	83.771	.822	.444	.023
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	7.055	1	7.055	.069	.793	.001
Years of Experience & Work Setting	Totalscore	94.259	2	47.129	.463	.632	.013

### **Hypothesis Fourteen**

Hypothesis Fourteen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and gender on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.33). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.738$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.822$ )

or gender ( $p=.688$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.117$ ).

*Table 4.33 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.013	.304	3.000	71.000	.822	.013
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.018	.422	3.000	71.000	.738	.018
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.020	.493	3.000	71.000	.688	.020
Years of Experience & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.079	2.031	3.000	71.000	.117	.079

Table 4.34 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.811$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.592$ ) or gender ( $p=.280$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and gender ( $p=.078$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Fourteen was not supported.

*Table 4.34 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Totalscore	30.290	1	30.290	.290	.592	.004
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	6.002	1	6.002	.057	.811	.001
Gender	Totalscore	123.461	1	123.461	1.182	.280	.016
Years of Experience & Gender	Totalscore	332.546	1	332.546	3.185	.078	.042

### **Hypothesis Fifteen**

Hypothesis Fifteen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, years of experience, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.35). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.824$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.781$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.137$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned ( $p=.606$ ).



Table 4.35 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Pillai's Trace	.016	.361	3.000	68.000	.781	.016
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.013	.301	3.000	68.000	.824	.013
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.134	1.655	6.000	138.000	.137	.067
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.064	.756	6.000	138.000	.606	.032

Table 4.36 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.476$ ). There was no main effect for years of experience ( $p=.826$ ); however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.008$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for years of experience and highest degree earned ( $p=.209$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure and a main effect for highest degree earned, Hypothesis Fifteen was not supported.

*Table 4.36 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of Experience	Totalscore	4.627	1	4.627	.049	.826	.001
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	48.874	1	48.874	.514	.476	.007
Highest Degree Earned	Totalscore	996.702	2	498.351	5.245	.008	.130
Years of Experience & Highest Degree Earned	Totalscore	304.014	2	152.007	1.600	.209	.044

### **Hypothesis Sixteen**

Hypothesis Sixteen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and gender on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.37). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.940$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.256$ ) or gender ( $p=.485$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.184$ ).

Table 4.37 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.006	.134	3.000	68.000	.940	.006
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.108	1.312	6.000	138.000	.256	.054
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.035	.825	3.000	68.000	.485	.035
Work Setting & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.122	1.497	6.000	138.000	.184	.061

Table 4.38 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.962$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.514$ ) or gender ( $p=.401$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and gender ( $p=.212$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Sixteen was not supported.

Table 4.38 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	.226	1	.226	.002	.962	.000
Work Setting	Totalscore	134.970	2	67.485	.671	.514	.019
Gender	Totalscore	71.765	1	71.765	.714	.401	.010
Work Setting & Gender	Totalscore	318.719	2	159.359	1.585	.212	.043

## Hypothesis Seventeen

Hypothesis Seventeen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, work setting, and highest degree earned on the ELICSES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.39). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.556$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.795$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.212$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.653$ ).

*Table 4.39 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.032	.700	3.000	64.000	.556	.032
Work Setting	Pillai's Trace	.047	.516	6.000	130.000	.795	.023
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.123	1.420	6.000	130.000	.212	.061
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.138	.797	12.000	198.000	.653	.046

Table 4.40 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated

no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.245$ ). There was no main effect for work setting ( $p=.817$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.052$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for work setting and highest degree earned ( $p=.443$ ). Due to a lack of main effect found for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Seventeen was not supported.

*Table 4.40 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	130.642	1	130.642	1.375	.245	.020
Work Setting	Totalscore	38.630	2	19.315	.203	.817	.006
Highest Degree Earned	Totalscore	586.227	2	293.114	3.085	.052	.085
Work Setting & Highest Degree Earned	Totalscore	359.421	4	89.855	.946	.443	.054

### **Hypothesis Eighteen**

Hypothesis Eighteen stated that there will be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. A MANOVA was utilized to perform a test for any main effects of the predictors of ethics curriculum structure, gender, and highest degree earned on the ELICES subscale two, subscale three, and total scores (See Table 4.29). Pillai's Trace MANOVA test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.684$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.274$ );

however, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.069$ ).

*Table 4.41 MANOVA – ELICSES Main and Interaction Effects*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Pillai's Trace	.022	.499	3.000	68.000	.684	.022
Highest Degree Earned	Pillai's Trace	.183	2.317	6.000	138.000	.037	.092
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.055	1.325	3.000	68.000	.274	.055
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Pillai's Trace	.160	2.005	6.000	138.000	.069	.080

Table 4.42 presents results from the total scores for tests of between-subject effects, which performed tests for main and interaction effects. The test results indicated no significant main effect due to ethics curriculum structure ( $p=.500$ ). There was no main effect for gender ( $p=.787$ ) or highest degree earned ( $p=.186$ ). The results indicated no interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.928$ ). Due to a lack of main effect for ethics curriculum structure, Hypothesis Eighteen was not supported.

*Table 4.42 Tests of Between-Subject Effects- Total Scores Main and Interaction Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ethics Curriculum Structure	Totalscore	46.009	1	46.009	.459	.500	.007
Highest Degree Earned	Totalscore	345.115	2	172.557	1.723	.186	.047
Gender	Totalscore	7.364	1	7.364	.074	.787	.001
Highest Degree Earned & Gender	Totalscore	14.970	2	7.485	.075	.928	.002

### **Post Hoc Analysis**

Since the results indicated a significant main effect due to highest degree earned, a post hoc analysis was conducted to determine the mean differences between the groups (masters degree, educational specialist degree, and doctoral degree) on their perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2, subscale 3, and total score). Table 4.43 indicates that school counselors with a doctoral degree have significantly higher perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues compared to school counselors with either a master's degree or educational specialist's degree. Accordingly, the post hoc analysis supports the MANOVA and ANOVA results that indicated highest degree earned has a significant main effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

*Table 4.43 Post Hoc Analysis – Mean Differences Between Groups*

Dependent Variable	Highest Earned Degree	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Subscale2	Masters	88.344	1.382	85.593	91.095
	EdS	87.202	1.871	83.478	90.927
	PhD	95.476	2.645	90.208	100.744
Subscale3	Masters	82.955	1.903	79.166	86.744
	EdS	81.806	2.576	76.675	86.936
	PhD	89.444	3.644	82.189	96.700
Totalscore	Masters	81.828	1.466	78.908	84.748
	EdS	79.873	1.985	75.920	83.827
	PhD	90.616	2.808	85.025	96.207

### Summary

The intent of the statistical analyses performed for the current study was to determine the effects of years of experience, work setting, gender, ethics curriculum structure, and highest degree earned on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. A total of eighteen hypotheses were used to structure the study. Survey data was collected from eighty middle school counselor in South Carolina. To analyze the data, a 3-way MANOVA was employed by the researcher. In reviewing results from the 3-way MANOVA conducted for the present study, all eighteen hypotheses were not supported. While the results indicated that there was no main effect due to ethics curriculum structure, the results indicated that there was a significant main effect due to highest degree earned on multiple subscale and total scores. Chapter Five will examine the results within the framework of the existing literature. Implications for future research and practice will also be explored.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of the study and interpretation of the research findings. Limitations are defined by the researcher, as well as conclusions concerning each of the hypotheses. Implications for future practice and research are also discussed.

#### **Overview**

The current study endeavored to explore the effects of ethics curriculum structure on middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. For the purposes of this study, ethics curriculum structure refers to a stand-alone or infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. Multiple 3-way MANOVAs were performed in order to compare subscale 2, subscale 3, and total scores on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale.

In reviewing results from the 3-way MANOVAs conducted for the current study, all eighteen hypotheses were not supported. The intent in using the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale was to examine the effects of the study's variables on two of the instrument's subscales and overall scale. With none of the subscales or overall scale reporting any levels of significance at or below .05, results concluded that there was no main effect for ethics curriculum structure for either of the subscales or overall scale on the ELICSES. Although all of the 3-way MANOVA Hypotheses were looking for significant main effects of ethics curriculum structure, the analysis of the results indicated that the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy

scale (subscale 2); counselor development and wellness self-efficacy scale (subscale 3); and overall perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues (total score) did discover a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p < .05$ ). In considering interaction effects, the 3-way MANOVA Hypotheses proposed there would be no interaction effects for years of experience, work setting, gender, and highest degree earned; however, the results reported interaction effects for differing variables. The results from the counselor development and wellness self-efficacy scale (subscale 3) reported a significant interaction between gender and highest degree earned ( $p = .032$ ).

The following section will offer a more detailed discussion of the findings within the context of the previously reviewed literature.

### **Hypotheses Discussion**

For the current study, the SPSS software system was utilized to conduct the statistical analysis. A 3-way MANOVA research design was utilized in order to determine school counselors' perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues by analyzing their responses to the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES). In keeping with previous literature, implementing a quantitative approach and MANOVA design were appropriate for the study.

#### **Hypothesis One**

Hypothesis One stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect of interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way

MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Two**

Hypothesis Two stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a

significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Three**

Hypothesis three stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a

school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

#### **Hypothesis Four**

Hypothesis Four stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of

preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Five**

Hypothesis Five stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no

significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on the suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Six**

Hypothesis Six stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 2 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While results indicated no main effect for gender or interaction effects for gender and highest degree earned, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ) on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the ELICSES. Results of this study were consistent with previous research that advocated for additional courses beyond graduate school training to improve knowledge regarding school law (Rawls, 1997). The differences between this hypothesis's results and previous research are worth considering and should be investigated further to determine the reasons for the differences in middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in relation to their highest degree earned.

### **Hypothesis Seven**

Hypothesis Seven stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on the counselor development and wellness subscale of the ELICSES.



Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2, subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Eight**

Hypothesis Eight stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on the counselor development and wellness subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Nine**

Hypothesis Nine stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While results indicated no main effect for years of experience or interaction effects for years of experience and highest degree earned, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.047$ ) on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor

development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES. Results of this study were consistent with previous research that advocated for additional courses beyond graduate school training to improve knowledge regarding school law (Rawls, 1997). The differences between this hypothesis's results and previous research are worth considering and should be investigated further to determine the reasons for the differences in middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in relation to their highest degree earned.

### **Hypothesis Ten**

Hypothesis Ten stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on the counselor development and wellness subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not

have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Eleven**

Hypothesis Eleven stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on the counselor development and wellness subscale of the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale

2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Twelve**

Hypothesis Twelve stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. The results of the 3-way MANOVA did not support this hypothesis. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on subscale 3 of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While results indicated no main effect for gender, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ) on perception of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES. Results of this study were consistent with previous research that advocated for additional courses beyond graduate school training to improve knowledge regarding school law (Rawls, 1997). The differences between this hypothesis's results and previous research are worth considering and should be investigated further to determine the reasons for the differences in middle

school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in relation to their highest degree earned.

The results also indicated a significant interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned ( $p=.032$ ) on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES. While a spurious result, given the focus of the present study, the interaction may be meaningful in a future study.

Therefore, a future study focusing on gender (male and female) and highest degree earned (masters, educational specialist, and doctorate) may be worth considering to determine the reasons for school counselor's preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

### **Hypothesis Thirteen**

Hypothesis Thirteen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or work setting on overall perceptions of preparedness on the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from

the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2, subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

#### **Hypothesis Fourteen**

Hypothesis Fourteen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness on the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale

2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

### **Hypothesis Fifteen**

Hypothesis Fifteen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for years of experience or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While results indicated no main effect for years of experience or interaction effects for years of experience and highest degree earned, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.008$ ) on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the ELICSES. Results of this study were consistent with previous research that advocated for additional courses beyond graduate school training to improve knowledge regarding school law (Rawls, 1997). The differences between this hypothesis's results and previous research are worth considering and should be investigated further to determine the reasons for the differences in middle school



counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in relation to their highest degree earned.

### **Hypothesis Sixteen**

Hypothesis Sixteen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or gender on overall perceptions of preparedness on the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

## **Hypothesis Seventeen**

Hypothesis Seventeen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Results also indicated no significant main effect or interaction effects for work setting or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness on the ELICSES.

Results of this hypothesis were inconsistent with previous research that suggested that ethics curriculum structure has an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical challenges in the field (Even and Robinson, 2013). The findings from the current study indicate that ethics curriculum structure, regardless of format, does not have an effect on school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (subscale 2 subscale 3, and total score). Accordingly, the results are inconsistent with previous research that advocates for a stand-alone course (Handelsman, 1986; Agresti, 1992; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010) or an infused curriculum (Downs, 2003; Hill, 2004) to prepare school counselors for legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter on the job.

## **Hypothesis Eighteen**

Hypothesis Eighteen stated that there would be a significant main effect for ethics curriculum structure (stand-alone course versus infused curriculum), but no main effect or interaction effects for gender or highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. As ethics curriculum structure was not found to show a significant main effect on the total score of the ELICSES, one cannot assume that a school counselors' ethics curriculum structure has a significant impact on his or her own perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

While results indicated no main effect for gender or interaction effects for gender and highest degree earned, there was a main effect for highest degree earned ( $p=.037$ ) on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the ELICSES. Results of this study were consistent with previous research that advocated for additional courses beyond graduate school training to improve knowledge regarding school law (Rawls, 1997). The differences between this hypothesis's results and previous research are worth considering and should be investigated further to determine the reasons for the differences in middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in relation to their highest degree earned.

## **Implications**

The intent of the present study was to determine the effect of ethics curriculum structure on middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues. Additional confounding variables that were examined in the present study included years of experience, gender, highest degree earned, and work setting. Based on the review of the eighteen hypotheses, the significant findings were that none of the eighteen 3-way

MANOVA hypotheses were supported. As stated in Hypotheses One through Eighteen, no main effect was found for ethics curriculum structure on subscale two (suicide, violence, abuse and neglect), subscale three (counselor development and wellness), or the total scores (overall perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues) on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. Nonsignificant findings from this research in terms of understanding middle school counselors' perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues were found as well.

Results from the present study provide implications for current and future professional school counselors, along with future research in school counseling field. These implications pertain to current school counselors, school districts, counselor education programs, and future school counselors.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

Based on the results of the present study, future goals of the school counseling profession should include discovering methods to continue increasing the preparedness of school counselors by encouraging their efforts to obtain additional legal and ethical training (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997). The school counseling profession has a duty to meet the developing needs of its school counselors. One of the findings of the present study indicated the clear need for gaining a better understanding of the needs of schools counselors in regards to preparedness with legal and ethical issues and their highest degree earned. Accordingly, school districts can provide legal and ethical training to all of their school counselors, regardless of their level of education.

The present study could not distinguish ethical preparation as a function of pre-practicum standing or degree completion. Since the impact of the practicum and internship experiences could not be discerned in the study, supervisors may want to check and reinforce ethics knowledge and application during both of these experiences. By doing so, supervisors can ensure that graduate students are adequately prepared to handle legal and ethical issues they may encounter in the field once they obtain their license.

School counselors are required to abide by standards and competencies set forth by the American School Counselor Association (2007). Although it is expected that school counselors will abide by the ASCA legal and ethical competencies and standards, the field must be proactive and offer school counselors workshops that focus on their legal and ethical training needs. For example, this may include offering sessions on legal and ethical issues throughout all school districts in the State of South Carolina and at the annual Palmetto State School Counselor Association conference that are geared toward increasing their preparedness with legal and ethical issues (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997). This may serve to close the gap on those with lower levels of preparedness with legal and ethical issues due to their level of degree earned.

While school counselors begin to examine methods to increase their preparedness with legal and ethical issues, graduate training programs must also consider their approach to legal and ethical training for their graduate students (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997; Remley & Huey, 2002). Results of the present study indicated that there was a significant main effect for highest degree earned on subscale two, subscale three, and the total score. Graduate training programs for school counselors should consider the possibility of reevaluating the content of their masters,

educational specialist, and doctoral training programs to ensure that the legal and ethical training content of each level are closely aligned with each other. By doing so, this may serve to increase school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues (Rawls, 1997).

If school counselors are not prepared to handle legal and ethics issues, it will be increasingly difficult to adhere to the criteria set forth by ASCA. School counselors can share the data from the present study with their school districts to advocate for additional legal and ethical training. Counselor educators can use the data to justify changes in their counselor training programs to meet the standards set forth by CACREP and ACA. More specifically, since the results indicated a main effect due to highest degree earned, counselor educators can use the data as a springboard to reevaluate the content of their masters, educational specialist, and doctoral level graduate training programs to ensure that the legal and ethical training content of each level are closely aligned with each other. This degree program alignment may serve to increase school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in their daily work.

As school counselors consider their increased risk for criminal and civil liability, they may want to provide the data from this study to their school districts to advocate for a mentor program and supplemental training. In regards to the mentor program, school counselors with a doctoral degree may provide legal and ethical support to school counselors with masters and educational specialist degrees. Furthermore, school counselors with masters and educational specialist degrees can use the data to encourage additional training through their school districts that is closely aligned with the training of schools counselors with doctoral degrees. By doing so, school counselors with masters

and educational specialist degrees will increase their preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As school counselors frequently encounter legal and ethical dilemmas in their daily work, it is imperative that they are adequately prepared to handle them. The results of the present study offer implications for practicing school counselors and graduate training programs.

The current study examined school counselors that are presently employed in the field. The study could not distinguish ethical preparation as a function of pre-practicum standing or degree completion. Accordingly, the impact of the practicum and internship experiences could not be discerned in the current study. A future study could focus solely on school counseling students before field-based work but post ethic course completion.

The present study found significant results in regards to the ways in which a school counselors' highest degree earned effects preparedness with legal and ethical issues. These results demonstrate the need for future research into school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues. While the present study aimed to answer one specific research question, further studies may serve to answer alternative questions regarding middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues.

The results of the present study provided further levels of analysis into school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues, such as: (1) How do middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues compare to that of elementary and high school counselors?; (2) How does South Carolina middle school counselors'

preparedness with legal and ethical issues compare with middle school counselors across the United States?; (3) What types of professional development opportunities are available to school counselors in legal and ethical training?; (4) What are practicing school counselors lacking in regards to legal and ethical training?; (5) How does the legal and ethical training content of masters, educational specialist, and doctoral level graduate training program align and differ? These questions, along with several others, may serve to increase the school counseling profession's overall understanding of how to begin increasing school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues they encounter in their daily work.

Further research into post graduation training in legal and ethical issues may benefit practicing school counselors. Results from this type of research may provide school counselors with the necessary data to advocate for additional legal and ethical training through their school districts. Previous research has stated the need for supplemental legal and ethical training for school counselors (Gibson & Pope, 1993; Davis & Mickelson, 1994; Rawls, 1997). Research that examines existing workshops and seminars that are available to practicing school counselors may be beneficial to school counselors seeking additional training. Moreover, it may even raise awareness into areas school counselor may not feel prepared in regard to legal and ethical training.

While the current study does not focus solely on school counselors' highest degree earned, the results of the survey in regards to preparedness with legal and ethical issues present a clear need to further research the content of masters, educational specialist and doctoral level graduate training programs. Counselor education programs are already required to cover ethical standards with their masters, educational specialist,



and doctoral students, because it is now a requirement for colleges and universities to include it in their curricula (Neukrug & Milliken, 2011). However, future research into the content of masters, educational specialist, and doctoral level training programs in regards to preparedness with legal and ethical issues may provide counselor educators with the springboard to justify the need to revamp their curricula to ensure that the legal and ethical content of both programs are more closely aligned with each other.

### **Limitations**

The present study included limitations that must be taken into account when analyzing the results. In examining the results of the data, there are limitations to portions of the research design. While the researcher followed all relevant precautionary steps to conduct the study, caution should be taken when considering generalizations from the present study's results.

A particular limitation to the present study was the assumption that the colleges and universities listed in the Demographic Data Questionnaire historically offered either a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. The researcher used the current course requirements to determine if the colleges and universities offered a stand-alone course or an infused curriculum in legal and ethical issues. Therefore, if the course requirements have changed over the years, the respondents could have been placed into an incorrect group.

Another limitation to the current study was the assumption that the curricula were identical for each college and university in the present study. More specifically, the researcher assumed that the colleges and universities that offered a stand-alone curriculum had an identical curriculum for legal and ethical issues. Similarly, the

researcher made the assumption that the colleges and universities that offered an infused curriculum had an identical curriculum for legal and ethical issues. A cross-sectional analysis of the content of each course would be necessary to determine if the stand-alone and infused curricula were identical for the colleges and universities in the present study.

The researcher's choice of instrumentation for the survey may also be considered a limitation. While the researchers tested the Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale for reliability and validity, the instrument has yet to be utilized for a research study because it was only recently created in 2014. The subscales of the ELICSES reported on survey respondents' suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. Although these subscales can infer one's preparedness to handle legal and ethical issues, the scale did not specifically measure 'preparedness with legal and legal issues'. Instead, the survey focused on the following areas: (1) suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy (subscale 2), (2) counselor development and wellness self-efficacy (subscale 3) and (3) overall perception of preparedness (total score). Moreover, while the ELICSES measures several of the ASCA ethical competencies, it does not include each competency in the survey. Accordingly, a different survey instrument may have yielded the researcher with a diverse set of data results.

Another limitation to the present study was the selection of participants. Although all middle school counselors in South Carolina were initially considered as potential participants for the present study, the researcher was limited to those that subscribed to the listserv provided by the South Carolina Department of Education and members of the Palmetto State School Counselor Association that submitted their email

addresses to the online directory. The selection was stratified in nature and was dependent on middle school counselors who chose to participate and complete the electronic survey. The participants of the present study may be different from that of the larger population of middle school counselors in South Carolina. More specifically, the participants could vary from the larger population based on gender, work setting, highest degree earned, years of experience, and ethics curriculum structure. The stratified sample utilized to obtain the results of the present study may not be representative of all of the middle school counselors in the state of South Carolina. Therefore, caution should be exercised when considering the generalizability of the results of this study.

Lastly, the data obtained from participants in this study was via a self-report method. Although it was explained to participants that survey results would remain confidential, participants may not have been honest when reporting their perceptions of preparedness with legal and ethical issues due to a lack of honesty or social desirability. School counselors may not feel prepared to handle legal and ethical issues; however, they may want to be perceived as being uncomfortable with handling legal and ethical issues.

### **Conclusion**

The current study investigated middle school counselors' preparedness with legal and ethical issues in South Carolina. This study examined middle school counselors' subscale two (suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy scale), subscale three (counselor development and wellness self-efficacy-scale), and total scores (overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues) for the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale. Moreover, school counselors conveyed their demographic information including gender, work setting, highest degree earned, years of

experience, and graduate program training (ethics curriculum structure). Results of the present study indicated:

1. There was a significant main effect for highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the ELICSES.
2. There was a significant main effect for highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES.
3. There was a significant interaction effect for gender and highest degree earned on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES.
4. There was a significant main effect for highest degree earned on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the ELICSES.
5. School counselors with a doctoral degree had significantly higher mean scores than school counselors with a master's degree and educational specialist's degree on perceptions of preparedness to handle suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect (subscale 2 scores) on the ELICSES.
6. School counselors with a doctoral degree had significantly higher mean scores than school counselors with a master's degree and educational specialist's degree on perceptions of preparedness to handle counselor development and wellness (subscale 3 scores) on the ELICSES.

7. School counselors with a doctoral degree had significantly higher mean scores than school counselors with a master's degree and educational specialist's degree on overall perceptions of preparedness to handle ethical and legal issues (total score) on the ELICSES.

Civil and criminal court proceedings have altered the manner in which professional school counselors fulfill their duties in the field. The present study has drawn attention to the importance of school counselors and their preparedness with legal and ethical issues. The aim of the researcher is for the findings of the present study to be utilized by school counselors, school districts, and counselor educators to hone their understanding of the preparedness of middle school counselors with legal and ethical issues. By doing so, school counselors and school districts may make informed decisions regarding professional development opportunities for current school counselors. Similarly, it may also allow counselor educators to make informed decisions regarding the content of their graduate training programs.

As school counselors and counselor educators are required to abide by legal and ethical standards and competencies set forth by the profession and the state of South Carolina, it is imperative that school counselors feel adequately prepared to handle legal and ethical dilemmas they may encounter in their daily work. An increase in preparedness with legal and ethical issues will allow school counselors and counselor educators to meet the criteria and standards set forth by ASCA, CACREP, ACA, and the state of South Carolina. It is the researcher's hope that this study will serve not only the professional needs of school counselors, but also provide counselor educators with a springboard for making changes to their curriculum content.

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APPENDIX A – ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES IN COUNSELING SELF-EFFICACY SCALE

<p><b>Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICESES®)</b></p>	
<p><b>Instructions:</b></p>	
<p>The items below describe different ethical and legal issues that regularly confront counselors in their practice. In the right columns, please rate how <b>confident</b> you are in your ability to address the specified ethical and legal issue. Rate your degree of confidence by <b>circling</b> a number from 0 to 100 using the given scale. Please only circle one number per response item.</p>	

**Highly**  
**Cannot**                      **Moderately**                      **Certain**  
**Do At All**                      **Certain Can Do**                      **Can Do**

1.	Distinguish when it is appropriate to report a case of abuse.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
2.	Maintain wellness to support my own counselor functionality.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
3.	Determine whether a client and counselor interaction is a boundary violation.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
4.	Recognize when it is appropriate to report a case of neglect.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
5.	Diagnose a presenting concern with client and/or student.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

6.	Define ethical and legal terms (e.g., subpoena, due process, & confidentiality).	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
7.	Recognize signs of abuse and/or neglect.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
8.	Respond to potentially suicidal clients and/or students.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
9.	Interpret a formal diagnosis of a mental and/or emotional disorder.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
10.	Take appropriate actions regarding potentially suicidal clients.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
11.	Circumvent negative dual relationships.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
12.	Describe the steps to take when facing an ethical dilemma.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
13.	Demonstrate knowledge of civil rights laws regarding clients and/or students.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
14.	Explain the professional role of a counselor.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
15.	Develop appropriate behaviors to support counselor wellness.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
16.	Comprehend discrimination laws and ethics as they apply to my clients and/or students.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
17.	Interpret the federal acts or laws to clients and/or students as they pertain to a presenting issue or situation.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
18.	Resolve an ethical dilemma.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
19.	Identify possible symptoms of abuse and/or neglect.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
20.	Recognize possible feelings of burnout within myself.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
21.	Recognize appropriate multiple relationships.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
22.	Implement and report assessments effectively.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
23.	Respond to a subpoena for records.	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

## APPENDIX B – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

**\* 1. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**\* 2. What grade levels are in your current school setting?**

- Kindergarten
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12

**\* 3. How many years of experience do you have as a professional school counselor?**

- 5 or less years of experience
- 6 or more years of experience

**\* 4. What is your highest earned degree?**

- Masters
- Educational Specialist
- Doctorate

**\* 5. What is your current work setting?**

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban

**\* 6. What college/university did you earn your school counseling degree from?**

- The University of South Carolina
- Winthrop University
- The Citadel
- South Carolina State University
- Clemson University
- I earned my school counseling degree from a college/university that is not located in South Carolina

**7. If you earned your school counseling degree from a college/university not located in South Carolina, please provide the name of the college/university:**