

# HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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## Selecting a Major for Law School

by Carol Leach

*"I've decided to become a lawyer. So. . .I have to major in political science, right?"*

*"I haven't taken any law courses as an undergrad, so I'll never get into law school."*

*"I only want to take classes that will help me in law school, so I'm majoring in criminal justice."*

Many of us hear comments like this on a daily basis (at least I HOPE I'm not the only one!) Although we repeat the prescribed mantras (law schools accept students from many majors, they look at the difficulty of the courses, major in something you ENJOY, etc.) disbelievers abound. And, unfortunately, there are plenty of people who are willing to take advantage of the naiveté of their students who WANT someone to tell them the exact formula for success in law school acceptance. Some professors promise in their syllabi that their course is THE MOST IMPORTANT course students can take to prepare them for law school. And students are willing to believe it. Others lure students in with the promise that their course will be better than others because they are "real" lawyers and can prepare students for law school better than college professors who "only" have PhDs.

With all this information bombarding them, is it any wonder that students become confused? Although I keep trying to get the word out, there are still those students who will take ANY lawyer's advice about the LSAT or selecting a major over mine, no matter what. And this advice is frequently wrong. I've had students who've finished their Masters degree in English come to me with plans to enroll for a second degree in "pre-law" so they can go to law school. Although it would be ideal if each student carefully researched the field, read "getting into law school" books, and talked to law school representatives BEFORE committing to a particular course of study, it's just not going to happen. So I decided to show them the statistics on admission by major and let them come to their own conclusions. The table below is based on data obtained from Law Services on the admission and enrollment rates of various majors in law school. Although the table does not list EVERY major (I believe there were more than 200 majors listed), it shows the most common majors that applied to law school in 1998 and their acceptance rates. With the table, I can point out that, yes, political science IS the most common major, but in 1998, 81 percent of applicants WEREN'T political science majors. In terms of getting into at least one law school, ten majors were more successful than political science! And yes, criminal justice majors DO get into law school, but it's nowhere near the most common of majors. If they really want to make SURE they get into law school, physics has the highest acceptance rate. That usually scares them enough to make my point!

As I tell my students, read the table and draw your own conclusions.

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[This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. It should be noted that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice.

Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.]

**National Application and Acceptance Rates for Selected Majors  
in Accredited Law Schools - Fall, 1998\***

<b>Major</b>	<b># of total applicants</b>	<b>% of total applicants</b>	<b># admitted to at least one law school</b>	<b>% admitted to at least one law school</b>
<b>Political Science</b>	13,431	18.57%	9,813	73.01%
<b>History</b>	5,178	7.16%	4,087	78.93%
<b>English</b>	5,017	6.94%	3,861	76.96%
<b>Psychology</b>	3,828	5.59%	2,802	73.20%
<b>Criminal Justice</b>	3,231	4.47%	1,819	56.29%
<b>Economics</b>	2,610	3.06%	2,037	78.05%
<b>Accounting</b>	2,124	2.94%	1,518	71.47%
<b>Sociology</b>	1,918	2.65%	1,271	67.27%
<b>Bus. Admin.</b>	1,799	2.49%	1,018	56.59%
<b>Finance</b>	1,667	2.30%	1,185	71.09%
<b>General Biology</b>	1,164	1.61%	875	75.17%
<b>Business Mgt.</b>	1,103	1.52%	667	60.47%
<b>Marketing</b>	967	1.37%	619	64.01%
<b>Biology, spec.</b>	513	.71%	442	82.26%
<b>Environmental Sci</b>	456	.63%	375	82.24%
<b>Chemistry</b>	453	.61%	343	75.72%
<b>Mathematics</b>	328	.45%	251	76.52%
<b>Computer Sci.</b>	307	.42%	192	62.54%
<b>Physics</b>	115	.16%	101	87.83%
<b>Other</b>	26,131	36.12%	17,147	65.63%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72,340</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>50,403</b>	<b>69.68%</b>

Highest admissions rates (>than 70%): Physics, Biology Specialties, Environmental Science, History, Economics, English, General Biology, Mathematics, Chemistry, Psychology, Political Science, Finance.

Lowest admissions rates (<60%): Criminal Justice, Business administration.

\*Based on information obtained from the Law School Admission Council for the 1998 entering class.  
[Table compiled by Carol A. Leach and published in *MAPLA Briefs*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Fall/Winter 2000.]