a significant stream of criminal cases over which the Court has little control. Over the past ten years, "appeals as of right" constituted roughly 10-15 percent of the cases on the Court's docket. Canada's Court also must hear "reference" questions (Hogg 1996). Although there are typically no more than one or two a term, references often raise fundamental political issues as exemplified by the current reference regarding the constitutionality of Quebec's secession from Canada. The United States Court does not render advisory opinions, and virtually its entire docket is now discretionary.

Table 1 summarizes these and other differences between the two courts. The jurisdiction of Canada's Court is much broader than the U.S. Supreme Court, for example (Hogg 1996, 204). This means the range and impact of cases decided by the Canadian Court is potentially greater than that of the American Court. At a minimum, the Canadian agenda could be more diverse. There are several other differences between the two courts that are important. The volume of discretionary appeals is smaller and more stable in Canada than in the United States.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

For the past 10 years, an average of about 475 leave to appeal applications were filed with Canada's Supreme Court (Supreme Court of Canada 1997, 6). In the United States, petitions for certiorari dealing with non-criminal cases averaged about 2,500 per year from 1985-1995 while the number of criminal petitions roughly doubled from 2,577 in 1985 to 5,098 in 1995 (Epstein etal 1996, 82-83). Acceptance rates also differ. Although both courts deny most applications, the acceptance rate in Canada is higher than in the United States. On the average, Canada allows leave to about 15 percent of the applicants in sharp contrast to the United States where the acceptance rate is generally around 4 percent for civil petitions and a mere .003 for criminal appeals.

The growth of interest group participation in litigation before the United States Supreme Court and its impact on the Court's certiorari process are well-documented phenomena (Epstein 1991; Caldeira and Wright, 1988a, 1988b, 1990; McGuire 1994). A similar development has occurred in Canada where the Court has relaxed its rules on standing (Bogart 1987, 1994; Gertner 1988) and it rarely declines requests by groups to intervene in cases (Welch 1985; Brodie 1992; Lavine 1992). Interest group involvement is focused exclusively on the stage *after* leave applications are granted, however (Brodie 1995; Epp 1995).