

Diversity Survey

October 2013



Grow through life



Introduction

- **Study conducted online between September 23 and October 3, 2013 among OLLI members. Excluded were those who joined in the Fall term because it was felt their newness would not provide a sufficient OLLI experience to answer questions knowledgably**
- **Diversity Task Force developed the survey with assistance from Research Committee**
- **Provides ‘snapshot’ of experiences, attitudes and inclinations – to be updated in future**
- **Sent to 1,122 members; 413 (37%) completed survey**
- **Report includes a summary of responses to the three open-ended questions as well as the closed-end or quantitative questions.**

The Three Open-ended Questions:

- If previously you were part of an organization that successfully increased racial/ethnic diversity, what strategies were employed to accomplish that?

111 of 393 (28%) said yes and offered an observation.

- If you have any suggestions about how OLLI could become more welcoming to diverse populations, please provide them here.

195 of 383 (51%) offered suggestions.

- If you have any other comments or thoughts about the issues covered in this survey, please share them with us here.

130 of 413 (31%) provided other thoughts.

SUMMARY of RESPONSES to OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

One Member's Perspective: If you have to survey members on diversity then you have a problem.

Respondents split evenly between those who thought OLLI did not present a welcoming environment to people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds as against those who saw OLLI's doors as open to all without distinction.

A plurality said that they were aware of, surprised by, or even appalled by the lack of diversity in membership. Others noted they were unaware of a lack of diversity. A few suggested that efforts to address the issue were a waste of time and energy. Reasons cited:

- **weaker representation of racial/ethnic minorities in the area**
- **many from these groups are still employed or may not have the educational background that lends itself to lifelong learning**
- **high fees for course taking.**

SUMMARY of RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, cont

Several cited the importance of direct social contact to effect greater diversity – one-on-one contact or individual to group or organization contact. Meeting people on their own turf and reaching out directly to one person or group at a time.

Potentially fertile sites for recruiting, marketing or learning about other cultures: Building Bridges, YMI, the YWCA and churches and community groups.

Quite a few asserted that adding local residents to membership was as important as people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds . Overt discrimination against people of southern or Appalachian backgrounds was raised by a few.

A handful said diversity efforts should start by recruiting a more diverse OLLI staff.

SUMMARY of RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, cont

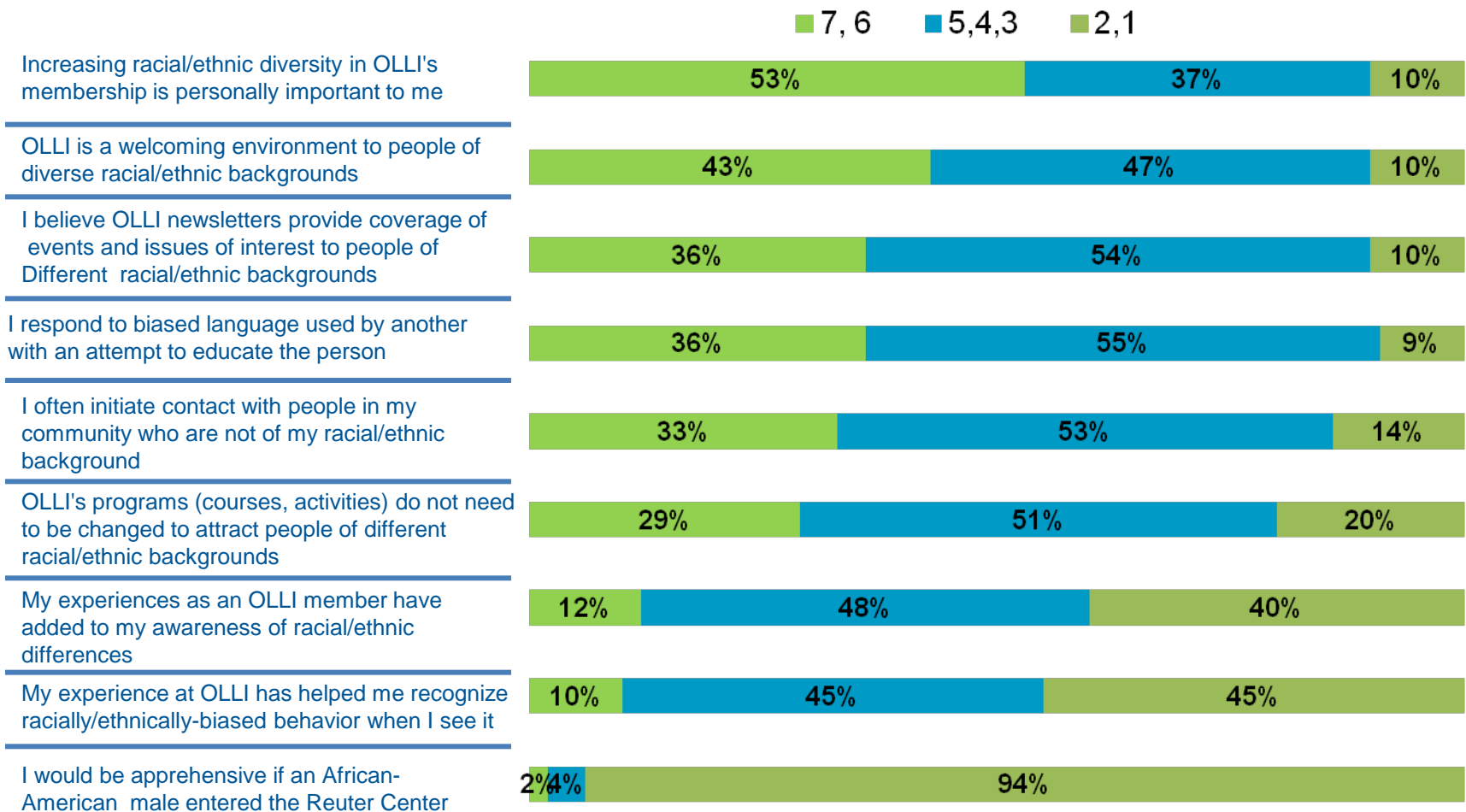
A number said that diversity efforts should begin with outreach to target groups to ask them their specific interests so as to better serve them. Others by contrast said OLLI offerings are fine as they are and folks can access what is offered - or not.

Many said diversity is a tough challenge and didn't know exactly what to suggest. A few observed that members should risk the discomfort involved in achieving diversity for the rewards the organization would receive.

A number said that members were not as sensitive to "white privilege" as they should be, while others counseled against concerning ourselves with the issue solely because of white guilt.

Finally many respondents offered thanks for OLLI addressing the issue and asked for more open discussion and treatment.

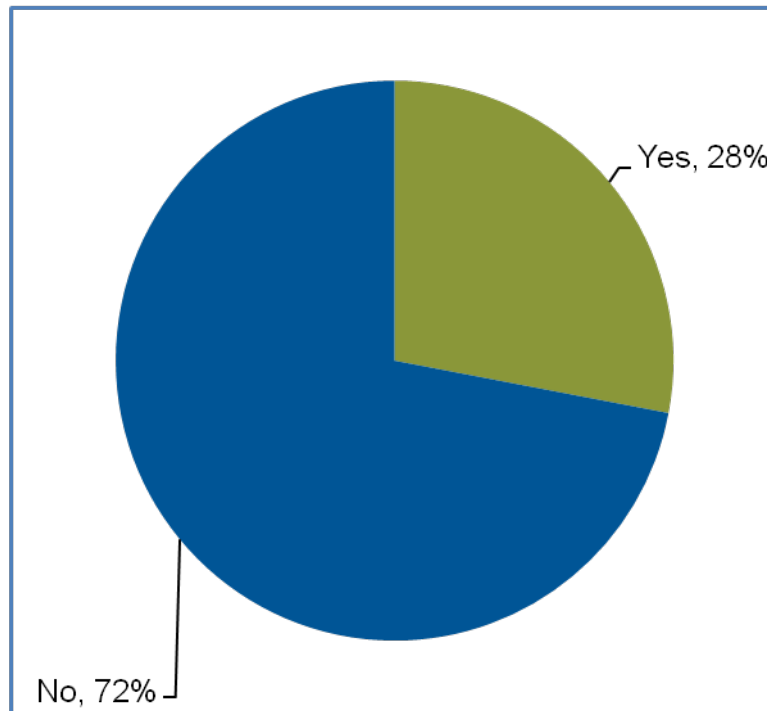
7-point scale from “7” (Strongly agree) to “1” (Strongly disagree)



N =409

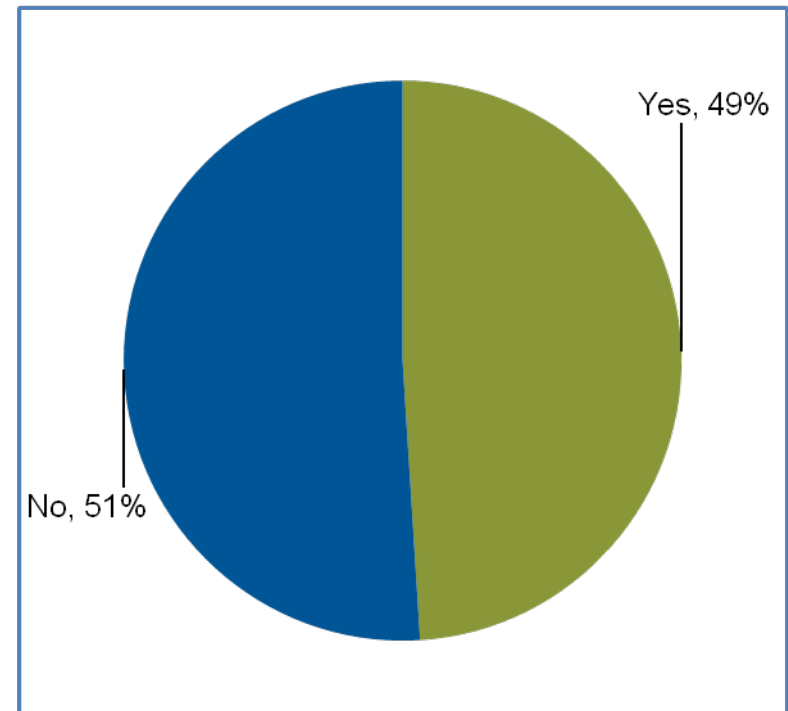
Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*

Been part of organization that successfully increased racial/ethnic diversity?



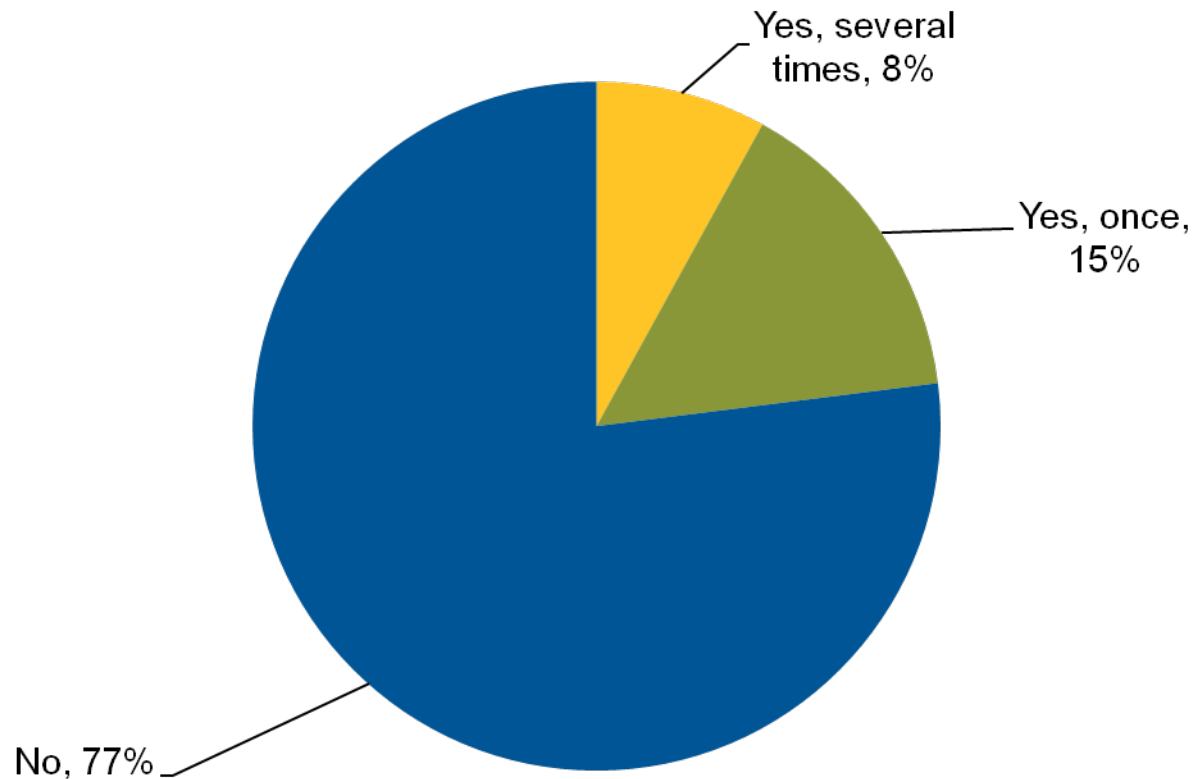
N = 393

Any suggestions how OLLI members could become more welcoming to diverse populations?



N = 383

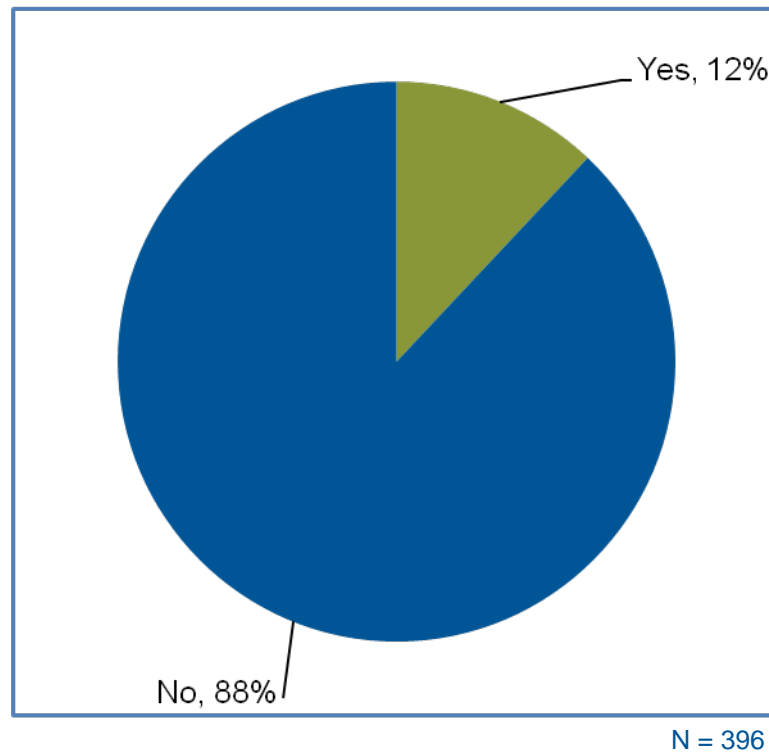
Extended OLLI invitation to person of color?



N = 404

Question: *I have invited a person of color to attend an event, join, or teach a course at OLLI*

Consider self part of ethnic/racial minority?



Question: *Do you consider yourself to be part of a racial/ethnic minority group?*



	# mentions
Jewish	26
White/Caucasian	5
Hispanic	4
Other	12

N = 47

Question: *IF YES – which one?*

Selected Verbatim Responses

This is one of the most important issues that we need to deal with. This is such a wonderful organization, and I am so pleased and honored to be a part of it. But it will not, in my opinion, fulfill its real potential until it becomes more diverse.

We are what we are. Our programs are open to everyone and obviously meet our members' needs. Please get over the diversity angst. As minorities become more integrated into our society and reach retirement age they will begin joining OLLI. The Reuter Center of 2025 will look like the UN.

What makes you think that many African-Americans or members of other minorities will be interested in OLLI? I think your effort has a twinge of white superiority. Asheville has a strong African American community that has been active for years.

Selected Verbatim Responses, cont

Generally, I encourage us to look for areas of commonality and to pursue those in a natural way. Also we need to be aware that many people crave predictability and resent change which leads them to resist change in subtle but effective ways. This integration process will probably be very gradual and slower than some of us might like.

OLLI is a terrific institute. Please do not change the nature and topic of our courses. We should encourage those of all diverse populations who are interested in the quality and excellence of what we offer to do so. We shouldn't seek to change who and what we are.

Every now and then, someone in a class or other event will point out the lack of African-American participants at OLLI in a way that sounds like we are unwelcoming or doing something wrong. I would like to have more African American participation, but it cannot be forced and I don't agree with the idea that we are doing something wrong.

Selected Verbatim Responses, cont

What about being more welcoming to people who are natives of this area? I have encountered more bias against Southerners in general, and Appalachian natives in particular, than the racial groups you are so concerned about. I hope some of the remarks I've heard from OLLI members that assume that all southerners are ignorant rednecks and that all mountaineers are worse are unintentional, but I'm really starting to wonder.

Few minorities can be seen in Asheville's malls, shops, and neighborhoods. I was wondering if they were discouraged by the people who are native to the area to mingle with the populace. I think we need to investigate the cause for the obvious segregation. Then we can see what can be done to change it.

Give it up. A worthy idea but not realistic if one understands Asheville's demographics and the fragmented nature of the area's ethnic groups. And are/would ethnic/racial minorities be at all interested in joining OLLI given the basic needs (like housing, food) of many?

Discourage the perception that OLLI is an elitist organization. I have heard that expressed in the past. It might help if a couple of permanent staff members were either African-American or Latino. Does anyone at OLLI speak Spanish?