

Society for Economic Botany Student Survey on Name Change

April 2020

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In the month of April 2020, I conducted a survey to gauge student opinions on the name of the Society for Economic Botany. Responses were collected via Google Forms.

Throughout the years, members of the Society for Economic Botany have drawn out an ongoing discussion about the organization's name "Economic Botany." A previous name change survey held in 2017 focused on all members as a whole, which did include students, but *did not* necessarily account for their individual responses. The following report seeks to fill that gap in knowledge about student members' thoughts; it is a small exposé of student member opinions on the Society's name change.

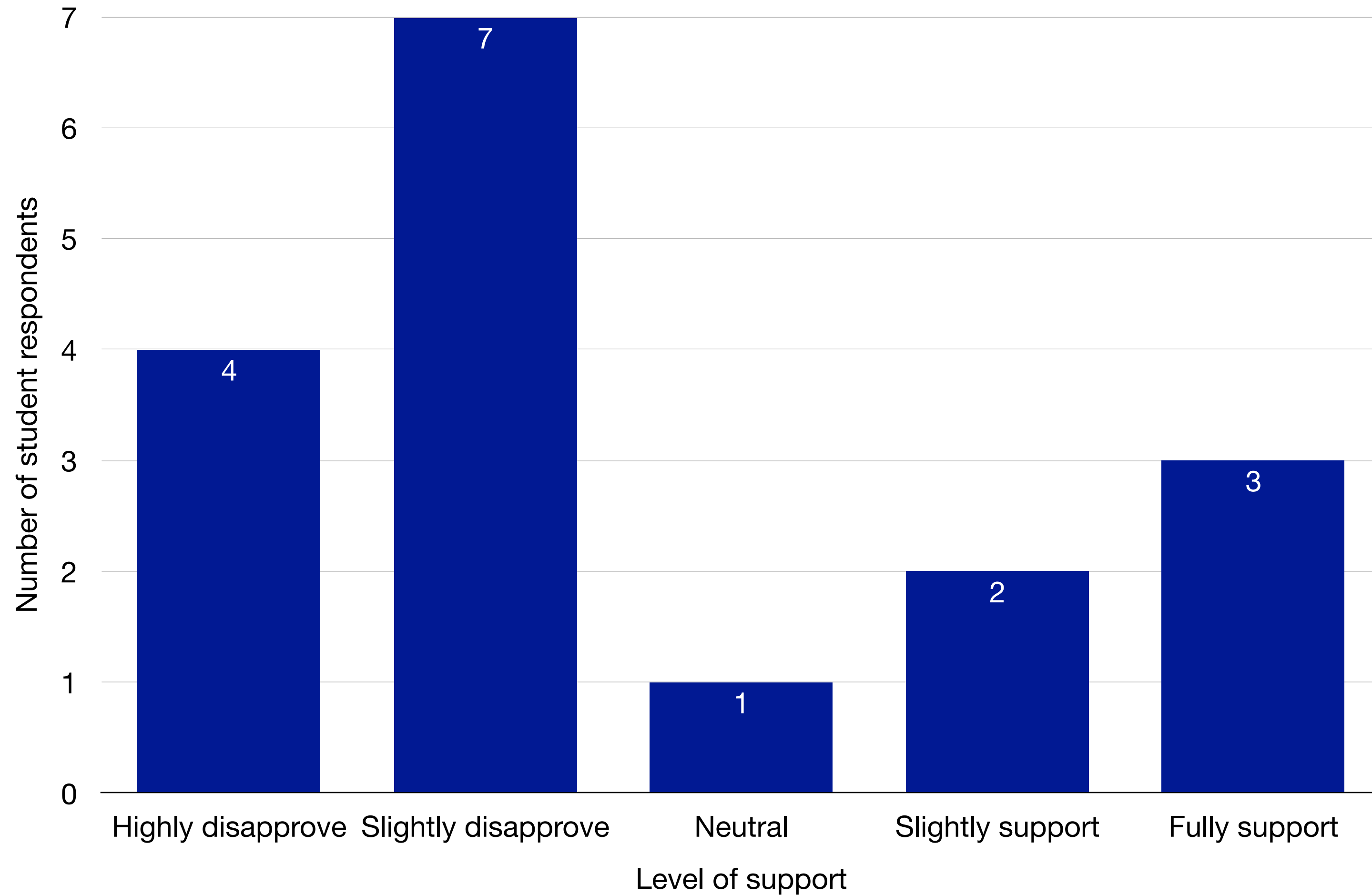
All student response names are anonymous.

Number of respondents: 18

Response rate: 19%

Total number of SEB student members in April 2020: 94

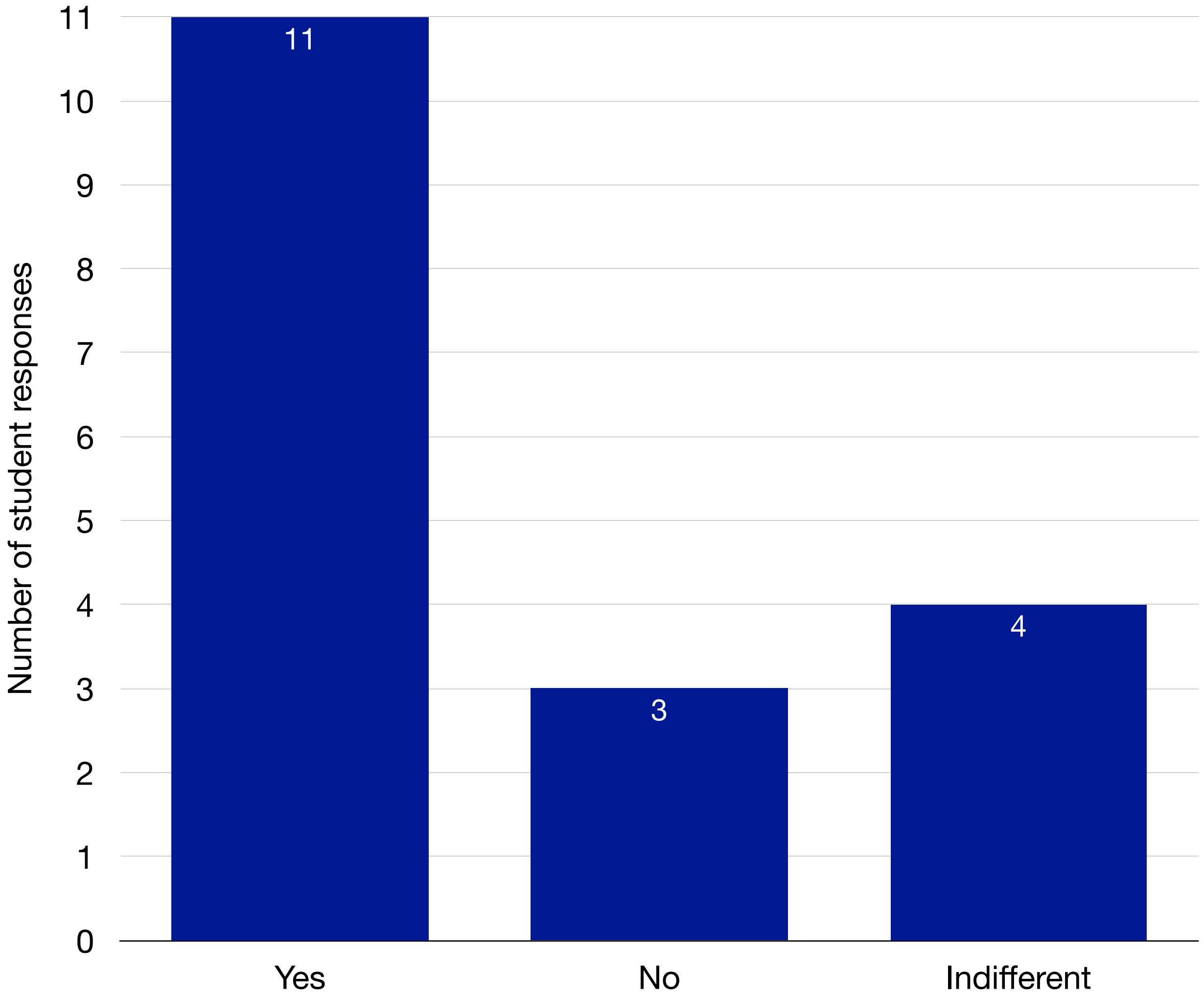
How favorable do you find the name "Economic Botany"?



The survey asked students how favorable they find the name “Economic Botany.” This question included an “Other” line for additional comment or an alternative choice.

To some degree, 11 student members disapprove; 7 slightly disapprove while 4 highly disapprove. 5 student members approve to some degree; 3 fully support while 2 slightly support. 1 student found the name neutral.

Do you think that the Society should rename its organization to something different than "Economic Botany"?

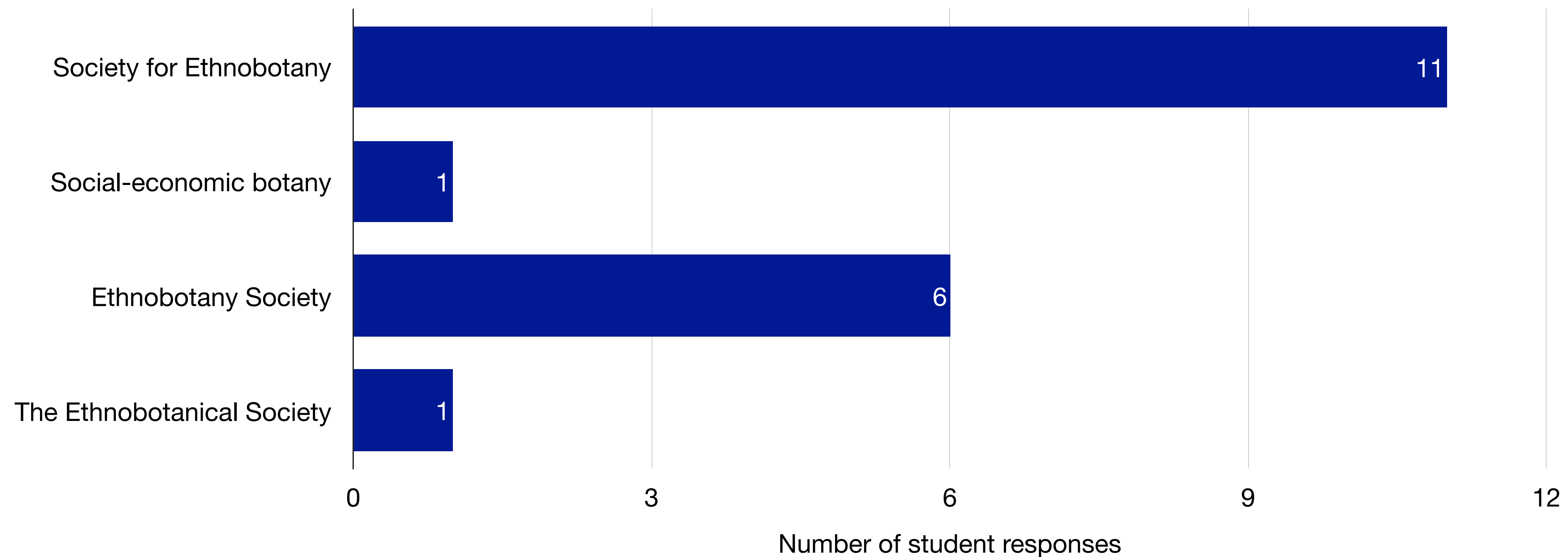


The survey asked students if they think the Society should rename its organization to something different than “Economic Botany.” This question included an “Other” line for additional comment or an alternative choice.

Overall, 11 student members said “Yes”; 3 student members said “No”; and 4 said they were “Indifferent.”

One student commented in the “Other” option, *“I think either we need to reinvent new post-colonial associations for the term or change it.”* Another student said in “Other” that they are *“neutral about changing, however recognize that given the colonial extractive history of the field economic botany it may bring up strong feelings of disapproval and discomfort for some people and that should be respected”*

If you *do not* support the name, and you think the Society should change its name, what would you be in favor of, instead of the term "Economic Botany"? Please check all boxes that you support, or provide an alternative(s) in "Other."



The survey asked students to select all and/or list an additional name they thought would be more appropriate than the term “Economic Botany.”

4 students chose both “Society for Ethnobotany” and “Ethnobotany Society.”

7 students chose only “Society for Ethnobotany.”

2 students chose only “Ethnobotany Society.”

1 chose only “The Ethnobotany Society.”

1 wrote only “Social-economic botany.”

3 students left this question blank.

Additional comments from individual students

- *“Thank you for considering changing the name! Unfortunately the old one comes off as exploitive....”*
- *“There are already other ethnobotany societies and meetings. The SEB has low membership, rebranding the name - with all the expenses this incurs-doesn't seem like a good move when there are other priorities. Economic Botany is a really easy concept for people who aren't ethnobotanists or anthropologists to understand. Economic Botany is now more relevant than ever as much ethnobotany and work by ethnobotanists is so important in understanding and advocating for the recognition of rural and agricultural livelihoods.”*
- *“It would be good to have “ethnobotany” in the name. However it's not a small change, as people are used to the name “Economic Botany” and it is also reinforced by the same name of the journal..”*
- *“Economic botany is a loaded term and I was rather turned off by it when I first heard it at the Economic Botany Collection at Kew. However, once Mark Nesbitt explained that they are repopularizing the term, I was more understanding. The term does encapsulate the history of ethnobotany. Let's face it. Colonialism was a major part of that history. However, the term also sounds extractive. In these times of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, we should ask ourselves whether that is how we want to present ourselves. Moreover, the terms economic botany and ethnobotany are not synonymous. Economic botany falls within economic botany, I would argue, referring specifically to plant use. However, the field of ethnobotany has expanded to the cognitive, linguistic and ontological dimensions. If we want the name of our society to reflect these expanding domains, then a different name would be more suitable.”*

continued...additional comments

- *“A reasoning for my disapproval: "economic botany" evokes a sense of agronomy or a business-centered approach, rather than a culture- or relationship-centered approach, to human-plant interactions. I fear many people who would be interested in the work being done by SEB would be deterred, assuming their research interests do not align with the mission of SEB simply from the name.”*
- *“If there is enough support a change should go ahead to honour those who disapprove of the name. It seems this change would not alter the content and membership interest, so it makes sense to support.”*
- *“Ethnobotany implies a narrower focus than economic botany. Would modern industrial applications of traditionally un-utilized nonnative plants fit? Ethnobotany also sounds confusingly similar to Ethnobiology and is bound to cause confusion with the Society of Ethnobiology.”*
- *“I have always found the term 'Economic Botany' difficult. Although it can be interpreted as the 'study of useful plants', it reeks of colonial-era botanical expeditions and suggests commoditisation of nature.”*

Future survey design suggestions

Going forward, there are a few suggestions for the survey that may benefit this ongoing discussion about the Society name change.

The iteration of this survey is in need of more options for the list of alternative Society names (page 5), similar to the listings on the 2017 SEB survey on name changes. Although this 2020 survey allowed for respondents to add their own names in the “Other” option, having an existing diverse set of names may more accurately gauge what names students are in favor of.

This 2020 survey did not ask for the origin or current location or nationality of students. In a future survey, it may be interesting to see the correlation between nationality and name change opinions.