

APPENDIX L

Comments Regarding the “Cost” of GE

Since the inception of GE, faculty have occasionally asked questions or made assertions about the cost of the curriculum. The resulting discussions have often been muddled by the lack of a common understanding of the meaning of “cost” as it relates to GE.

Without attempting to draw conclusions about the cost of GE, the task force identified differing definitions that appear to come into play when cost is mentioned:

When people speak of the “cost” of GE, they sometimes seem to refer to the opportunity costs of investing resources in courses to serve GE at the expense of investing those resources in something else (e.g., more numerous, specific, varied, and rigorous courses for majors; or more experiential learning).

They sometimes seem to refer to the facilities costs of supporting the increase in required classes in fields that are perceived to be expensive to teach. (For example, sometimes people suggest that expanding NST required increases in instruction that is expensive; but science faculty suggest this is not so.)

They sometimes seem to refer to the idea that because certain attributes are closely connected to certain departments those attributes have the effect of guaranteeing the FTE of those departments, perhaps at some future cost to the FTE of other departments that are not similarly buffered by clear ownership of any attributes.

They sometimes seem to refer to the notion of the total cost of instruction for the courses necessary for a student to complete all GE requirements. This appears to be greater than the cost of the former “distribution” requirements, which were fewer in number. (But then, conversely, sometimes people say that GE costs nothing at all since all students take no more nor fewer than 35 courses regardless of whether those courses are fulfilling GE or some other interest.)

They sometimes seem to refer to the cost of having many teachers teach many courses outside their primary areas of expertise, which may require faculty development, and which may mean that we have, in a sense, less competent teaching than we would under a different curriculum.