Travis Childs opened the meeting with introductions and a synopsis of the charge from Faculty Senate for the committee—a discussion on SafeAssign and Turnitin plagiarism software and the matter of excused absences for university sanctioned non-social events and recognized religious observances.

Margot Gregory spoke first on the SafeAssign program residing within the Blackboard platform. She informed that the program is integrated within Blackboard and comes at no additional cost to the university; whereas Turnitin is a separate add-on costing over $6000 the last time the university used the software. Gregory also informed that we are scheduled for an upgrade to both SafeAssign and Blackboard at the end of the Spring 2015 semester in May. This upgrade is expected to fix several problems within the program. Gregory offered a handout that compared SafeAssign and Turnitin.

John Hodgson, from the English Department, questioned the need to use either one since the amount of detected plagiarism in the past couple of years shows a marked decrease. He further noted that SafeAssign has many false positives because the database is too narrow and the report is too broad. He preferred Turnitin because the plagiarism report uses a much broader database and offers a more readable and usable report for both the instructor and student. Also, Turnitin allows students to run their paper through the program before actually turning the paper in to the instructor. Hodgson suggested asking for another “pilot” use for Turnitin to perhaps avoid paying the full price for the software and to compare to the SafeAssign planned future upgrade. He wondered about Turnitin copyright issues. All in all, Hodgson claimed that the English Dept. is very interested in the capabilities of Turnitin and they find SafeAssign too bulky and time consuming for regular use for grading.

Gregory responded that there are IT concerns about having the personnel and time to add the Turnitin software, especially because Turnitin has a lot of student complaint that SafeAssign does not.

On the issue of Turnitin, Childs will notify VP Sylvia Burgess that we would like a Turnitin demonstration to be available to members of the committee, as well as to any interested members of the general faculty, especially the English Dept.
Travis Childs held the discussion here and no resolution was forthcoming. Guests Hodgson and Gregory left the meeting.

On the issue of excused absences, Childs informed that there currently is no protection for either the students or the university regarding events and religious observances. Professors are handling these absences on their own in their own preferred way. Oklahoma does not currently have any laws regarding religious observances; although many universities do have general legal clauses that deal with the issue.

Suzanne Crawford mentioned that not all athletes travel to every game, making the blanket beginning of the semester letter from a coach impractical. Some students must be taken off lists due to academic issues and some students may earn time back on the team. Crawford claimed there has to be a longer time frame to allow a “good” list of student involvement. Justin Walton was asked about the Debate Team and whether team members knew the days they would be absent at the beginning of the semester, and he affirmed that students had this information. Hyunsoon Wang countered that in Music, students may not necessarily know at the beginning of the semester since some opportunities arrive at the last minute.

Childs offered that he has only had one student in his ten years of teaching that has mentioned the need for time off for religious observances. The student told him about it on the first day of class and there was no problem with the issue at that time. There were no other shared experiences regarding religious observances; however Crawford said this issue needs to be dealt with soon because Cameron University is the 2nd most diverse university in Oklahoma.

As this issue requires a policy change, Childs held the issue here and advised members to research other university policies on this topic.

Childs ended the meeting noting that the committee did not need to meet regularly and only in instances when the Faculty Senate charged the committee with an issue. No new meeting was established.

The committee adjourned at 4:30.

Submitted by Teresa Morales, secretary