AI Contract Review Software Proposal

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Background:

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) is responsible for the administration of research contracts and grants received by the university. OSP has a team of contract administrators who work with sponsors to negotiate and finalize research contracts. The contract negotiation process is time-consuming and requires careful review of legal and technical terms. Currently, the contract review process is manual and can be subject to errors and inefficiencies. The number of contracts requiring review and their complexity has grown significantly over the past few years with Auburn’s upward trajectory in research funding. However, the number of staff in OSP has remained relatively stagnant. OSP’s review workload is expected to continue to increase with President Robert’s mission to double research expenditures. Pursuant to item number six of the AU Strategic Plan, Operational Excellence, OSP is interested in developing an AI tool to assist with contract review and negotiation in order to enhance the contract review process. There are multiple commercial options available (LegalSifter, Cobblestone) but they are not cost-efficient. OSP believes a homegrown tool can be developed that would better address the University’s needs.

Objective:

The objective of this project is to engage senior design students from the College of Engineering in developing an AI tool that can assist OSP contract negotiators in reviewing and negotiating research contracts. The AI tool will be designed to identify and flag legal and technical issues in the contracts, suggest potential revisions, and provide guidance on negotiating terms.

Scope:

The project will be completed by senior design students from the College of Engineering’s Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering. The AI tool will be developed by a team of students with expertise in AI and machine learning. OSP staff will provide input on the specific legal and technical issues that the AI tool should identify as well as proposed revisions for consideration.

Deliverables:

The deliverables for this project include:

1. A functional AI tool that can assist OSP contract negotiators in reviewing and negotiating research contracts. Potential functionality include:
   1. Scanning contract documents (Microsoft Word, Adobe PDF) for words, phrases, and sentences that represent problematic contractual issues for Auburn.
   2. Providing alternative language for such issues and AU’s justifications for such changes.
   3. Learning from successful negotiations with sponsors to streamline future reviews.
   4. Weighing the overall risk of a contract based upon input of risk factors (scope of work, contract partner, budget amount, quality of terms, etc.).
2. A user manual and training materials for the AI tool.
3. A report on the performance of the AI tool, including its accuracy in identifying legal and technical issues in contracts and the time saved by OSP contract negotiators.

Timeline:

The project will be completed during the senior design class, which is typically one academic year (not sure if AU class is 1 semester or 2). The first semester will focus on design and development, while the second semester will focus on testing and evaluation.

Budget:

No significant costs are anticipated. OSP will provide the necessary financial support for completion of the project. An estimate of these expenses will be discussed and agreed upon prior to commencement of the project.

Conclusion:

Engaging senior design students in the development of this AI tool will provide a unique opportunity for students to apply their engineering skills to a real-world problem. The AI tool developed in this project will significantly enhance the contract review and negotiation process conducted within OSP, saving time, reducing errors and lowering the risk profile of the University. If viable, the tool may also be modified to assist other AU departments involved in contract negotiation (Procurement and Business Services, The Intellectual Property Exchange). This project will also provide an opportunity for OSP staff to work with students to develop a useful tool while providing valuable experience for the students. Depending on the tool developed, there may also be an ancillary commercial benefit to the developers.