Obolus Pitch:

Obolus is a digital asset estate handler. When their client dies, they will handle online accounts. They will delete accounts (those of a personal, or embarrassing sort) or transfer accounts over to loved ones. So they handle death certificates, but also require personal information from the client before they die, so they handle a great deal of sensitive information. Interestingly enough, not passwords. They are supposedly partnered with 250 “big name companies” in ways that allow the company to see death certificate and get other personal information that then allows Obolus access to data. That is pretty much it in a nutshell. But they guy took FOREVER to explain this. Bogged down in irrelevant info. We should try to be concise.

There were 3 things he wanted from UW students.

1. Penetration testing for his security.
2. Email sorting agent
3. AI document scanner

Big take-aways:

His pitch was highly uninformed. Clearly had no idea what he was asking for. He is a small start-up from Florida. Regarding his largest misunderstanding, he had no idea what AI really is. He maybe, as a start-up, has a few dozen clients. Maybe 1000’s if they are doing well. But he has a database of documents … with nothing in it. He wants an AI that can analyze and image, report what it is (death certificate, drivers license, etc.) and extract pertinent information from it… He wants something that would require millions of examples of training data, when he has only some 100’s or 1000’s that he probably isn’t legally allowed to share with us. That plus all security problems that would rise with an AI of this type.

Regarding security testing, he seemed to want us to be able to present guarantees of security. Borowczak informed him we could point out weakness in no formal way, and make no guarantees of strength. He seemed relatively ok with this.

The email scanner was somewhat a reasonable request that could be done by students over the course of some years, and in small irregular chunks of work. It would simply require that we scan through content and subject to prioritize time sensitive info, like bills, to the front for the caretakers of the accounts to handle.

Over all, he had very little knowledge of what he wanted, and didn’t seem to understand that a university can only do a little, if students are willing to work on it, and that we can offer no guarantees and certainly not guarantee anything on a timeline or any level or operability. He clearly wanted to try and save some money and get students to do all the work for free. Yes, he expected students to do all this work “for the valuable real world experience.” Borowczak told him the most we could promise is maybe to offer some advise. The Obolus guy seemed to think that the Universities are for free amazing software, and for free information. Really he just wanted a lot of freebees with no promise of anything substantial in return. His pitch was long, greedy, uninformed, and will likely never amount to anything here at the university.