

# AI Basics for the Curious — Spring 2026

**OLLI @ California State University, Fullerton**

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**Location:** Mackey Auditorium (CSUF) / Zoom / Stream

**Schedule:** Alternate Tuesdays, 2:15–4:00 p.m. (90 minutes)

## **Session Dates:**

February 10 • February 24 • March 10 • March 24 • April 14 • April 28

(No class May 12)

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## **Course Description**

*AI Basics for the Curious* is a thinking-centered course designed for learners who want to better understand artificial intelligence without needing a technical background.

Rather than focusing on coding or tool mastery, the course emphasizes:

- How AI systems **sound, behave, and influence decisions**
- The difference between **confidence and correctness**
- When AI can assist thinking — and when **human judgment must remain central**
- How responsibility, ethics, and oversight still belong to people

Curiosity is encouraged.

Skepticism is welcome.

No prior experience with AI is required.

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# Course Format

This course blends short instructor presentations with guided discussion and reflection. Students may attend in person or via Zoom.

There are:

- No exams
- No required technology use
- No pressure to “keep up.”

The focus is on understanding, not performance.

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## Session Schedule & Topics Syllabus

### Session 1 — February 10

#### **From Curiosity to Judgment: Thinking Carefully About AI**

A welcoming review and reset for both returning and new students.

**Topics include:**

- Why AI didn't start yesterday
- Why AI feels different now that it “talks back.”
- The shift from access (Fall) to discernment (Spring)
- Confidence versus correctness
- Low-stakes versus high-stakes uses of AI
- Why judgment and responsibility still belong to humans

Students are introduced to a light between-session reflection focused on noticing AI in everyday life.

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### Session 2 — February 24

#### **How AI Produces Answers (and Why That Matters)**

A practical, non-technical look at how AI systems generate responses.

**Topics include:**

- What does AI mean by “prediction”
- Why AI can sound fluent even when uncertain
- Why AI cannot verify truth on its own
- Understanding hallucinations and confident guessing
- When AI is helpful for explanation versus risky for conclusions

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## **Session 3 — March 10**

### **Thinking With AI: Assistance vs. Authority**

Exploring the difference between using AI as a helper and treating it as a decision-maker.

#### **Topics include:**

- Delegation versus abdication
- Where AI adds value (drafting, summarizing, brainstorming)
- Where AI should never decide alone
- Human responsibility in the loop
- Real-world examples from medicine, law, and daily life

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## **Session 4 — March 24**

### **AI, Ethics, and Responsibility in the Real World**

How institutions, laws, and societies are responding to AI.

#### **Topics include:**

- Why ethics matter more as tools become more powerful
- Bias, accountability, and oversight
- Why “the algorithm did it” is not an excuse
- Legal expectations for human involvement
- What does responsibility mean in an automated world

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## **Session 5 — April 14**

### **Living With AI: Culture, Trust, and Human Choice**

Looking beyond tools to the cultural and psychological effects of AI.

## Topics include:

- Trust, persuasion, and confidence
- How AI shapes habits and expectations
- Attention, speed, and reflection
- Choosing when *not* to use AI
- Staying human in a world of smart systems

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## Session 6 — April 28

### From Understanding to Application: AI in the Real World

A capstone session combining demonstration, reflection, and discussion.

During approximately **one-third of this session, CSUF students will present AI-related semester projects**, demonstrating AI in real time and applying course concepts and themes to real-life situations.

These presentations highlight:

- Practical uses of AI as they exist today
- The role of judgment, responsibility, and human oversight
- Where AI meaningfully assists thinking
- Where human decision-making remains essential

The remaining two-thirds of the session will be instructor-led and discussion-based, allowing OLLI students to reflect on what they observed and connect demonstrations back to the course's central themes.

This session serves as both a **capstone and a conversation**, bringing together ideas, lived experience, and cross-generational perspectives.

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## What Students Can Expect

- A welcoming, discussion-friendly environment
- Clear explanations without technical jargon
- Real-world examples tied to everyday life
- Respect for different comfort levels with technology

Curiosity is the only prerequisite.