

AI Basics for the Curious — Spring 2026

OLLI @ California State University, Fullerton

Instructor: Danny Torres

Email: danny.tech.world@gmail.com

Phone: 714-461-1991

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)

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.

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.

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.

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
-

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
-

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
-

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
-

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.

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.