

Experiments in Artificial Intelligence — Continuing, Winter 2026

Session 2 | February 18, 2026 | OLLI at Southern Oregon University

Session Summary

- Introduced AI “agents” — AI that can reach out to external websites and services (like Expedia or Instacart) to actually complete tasks, not just answer questions.
- Covered MCP (Model Context Protocol), the connector standard that lets an AI talk directly to outside services and databases.
- Opening data: ChatGPT reached a billion users in about two years — far faster than the internet (about 12–15 years) or mobile phones (about 25 years) took to reach the same milestone.
- Major tech companies are on pace to spend roughly \$1 trillion combined on AI data centers this year alone.
- Discussed AI-risk perspectives, including Eliezer Yudkowsky's concerns about AI systems that improve their own code without built-in safeguards.
- Reviewed Theory of Mind in more depth — its roots in child development (around age four) and why AI companies employ neuroscientists to help AI systems model human behavior and intention.
- Live demo of custom instructions/personalization: setting ChatGPT to always respond in bullet points, choosing a tone, and turning off emojis — and how that changes every future response.
- Demonstrated connecting ChatGPT to outside apps: Instacart (grocery pricing), Expedia (flights and hotels), and Google Drive (searching personal files) — along with some real connection failures (Gmail, Outlook) as honest examples of where the technology still breaks.
- Multilingual demo: spoke to the AI in German (voice) and asked it to respond about Vietnamese, showing real-time translation and voice interaction across languages.
- Demonstrated the Deep Research feature, which runs many searches automatically on a topic over several minutes.
- Compared the free vs. paid (\$20/month “Plus”) tiers of ChatGPT — apps/agents and file analysis require the paid tier.

- Closed with a discussion of AI monetization: concerns that adding ads to AI chat interfaces could push systems to become more manipulative or emotionally persuasive, and a note that Anthropic (maker of Claude) has stated it will not add ads.

Prepared with AI assistance from a transcript of the recorded session.