

Experiments in Artificial Intelligence — Continuing, Winter 2026

Session 3 | February 25, 2026 | OLLI at Southern Oregon University

Session Summary

- Opened with the infrastructure side of AI: the electricity (measured in gigawatts) that data centers require, and industry financial projections (JP Morgan, Raymond James) showing data-center revenue roughly quadrupling over the next several years.
- Profiled several notable figures behind today's major AI companies: Dario and Daniela Amodei (Anthropic/Claude), Ilya Sutskever (an OpenAI co-founder), and Mustafa Suleyman (now head of Microsoft AI, previously a co-founder of DeepMind and of Inflection AI).
- Noted the ongoing, publicly reported dispute between Anthropic and the U.S. Department of Defense over the conditions under which the military can use Claude — relevant background given that Claude is currently the AI approved for use in Defense Department systems.
- Traced the pace of computing progress with concrete numbers: from Intel's first processor (1971) through today's chips, and from 1930s telegraph speeds to today's gigabit home internet — illustrating just how fast AI's underlying technology has scaled.
- Explained, at a conceptual level, how a neural network actually learns — using the classic example of a network trained to recognize handwritten digits, and introducing the vocabulary of weights, bias, cost function, and backpropagation.
- Reviewed the vocabulary of alignment (does an AI's underlying motivation serve the user, or the company running it?), tokens, context window, and reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF).
- Toured the Microsoft 365 / Copilot ecosystem in depth: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Teams, OneDrive, Designer, and how Copilot is woven into all of them.
- Compared each major company's product ecosystem side by side: OpenAI (ChatGPT, Codex, Sora, Atlas), Google (Gemini, Docs, Gmail), Microsoft (Copilot, Word, Excel), and Apple (Apple Intelligence, Pages, Mail).
- Noted that Copilot's business-oriented connectors (ServiceNow, Workday, SharePoint, Microsoft Dynamics) target enterprise use, in contrast to ChatGPT's more consumer-facing connectors covered last session.

- Live demo of Copilot's 'Office Agent' completing a multi-step task on its own — researching Oregon's requirements for running for elected office and producing a cited Word document in about 14 minutes, versus the days or weeks such a document historically took a team of people to produce.
- Closed with a discussion of what this kind of automation means for knowledge work and university education, plus a note that OpenAI may begin adding advertising to ChatGPT.

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