In the early spring of 2000, the dean of our business school created a task force to examine strategies for the school's e-commerce curriculum. He handed us a set of articles from *The Wall Street Journal*, an e-business textbook [5], and brochures from top-notch business schools offering e-commerce curricula. The task force was divided into workgroups and each was assigned action items, including researching other e-commerce program launches, developing a framework for systematic study of e-commerce, preparing a course overview, listing types of support needed from the dean's office, and locating corporate partnerships and guest speakers. The final report of the task force was expected to recommend whether we should offer one or multiple courses, a concentration or a degree program, and whether the offerings should be at the undergraduate or graduate level.

The task force consisted of faculty members from marketing, management, finance, accounting, and information systems—with some individuals more enthusiastic than others regarding the need for an e-commerce curriculum. As an MIS faculty member, I leaned toward the naysayers regarding this latest buzzword, as several e-commerce programs I examined on the Web appeared to be hijacking our MIS program.

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On Site

**The Rise and Fall of an E-Commerce Program**

E-commerce may be here to stay, but how to teach it is still up for debate at many institutions.

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While our task force discussed a possible e-commerce program, I contemplated a possible course in e-commerce technology. During this research period, I was encouraged to forward a potential syllabus for my proposed course to the other task force members.

By early summer of 2000, we had adequate knowledge of the arena of e-commerce curricula. We looked at 31 relevant programs nationwide and found that most schools offered a master's degree, typically an MBA, with an e-commerce concentration. Three schools offered a master's, and three a bachelor's degree in e-commerce. The MBA concentration consisted of four courses, the master's about 15, and the bachelor's about eight e-commerce courses. Most programs offered an introductory e-commerce course and sometimes an e-marketing course. Marketing, information technology, and security were covered in most courses. There was some finance, but little accounting coverage. The remainder of the courses were traditional MIS or CIS courses such as database, network, and programming. In most cases, the faculty members were drawn from various business disciplines, with the majority from the MIS program.

In mid-summer, the task force delivered a strategic plan comprised of three essential elements: a graduate-level survey course for fall 2000, an academic program, likely an MBA with an e-commerce concentration, and a certificate program for groups disinclined toward an academic program.

**Developing and Teaching the Courses**

During the latter part of summer 2000, the 16-week graduate survey course was marketed to MBA students and the university community through flyers and posters around campus. The course was scheduled to be taught as a team, with faculty members gathered from various areas of business. Guest speakers were selected, as well as a coordinator for course management. The course content spanned areas such as Internet technology, Web design, e-commerce entrepreneurship, online business management, Internet security and law, electronic payments, business-to-business and business-to-consumer issues, and international e-commerce.

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topic courses were offered in the fall of 2000: the introductory e-commerce course and the e-commerce technology course, with about 40 students enrolled in each. While the introductory course followed no text, the technology course did [6]. Most students in the introductory course were from the MBA program, while the technology course students were all from the MIS program.

In the spring of 2001, I undertook the responsibility of teaching the introductory e-commerce course in addition to the technology course. Surprisingly, while my e-commerce technology course had more than 40 students, only eight students enrolled in the introductory e-commerce course. I was cautioned by colleagues that MBA students would have inadequate technical knowledge compared to our MIS students, and I would need to teach them in a toned-down fashion. But, this did not prove true: the MBA students were adequately or even better prepared for e-commerce technology, as most worked in the IT field.

I taught the two courses somewhat differently, but both used the same lecture text [6], with differing project texts. In the introductory course, students were required to complete several clearly defined hands-on projects [2], while the technology students developed a live e-commerce system as a class [4].

In the fall of 2001, the introductory e-commerce course was not offered. The students who took the technology course were mainly from the MIS program, but a handful of MBA students also attended. The course was revamped to include my class notes for basic e-commerce technology, and a text on ASP (Active Server Pages) programming [3]. Students worked in groups and developed several wonderful live e-commerce systems that included various catalogs, search capabilities, marketing materials, shopping carts, and customer accounts. Their projects included a library checkout system, a book order system, a teaching assistant sign-in system, a fruit ordering system, a music and video purchasing system, and an auto auction system (see the figure). A complete list and live demonstrations of these systems are available at my Web site: b3308-bpa.cl.uh.edu/isam5931/Course/ECM/Projects.htm.

Current Status and Future Direction
Today, there is no discussion of an e-commerce program at our university. The idea went bust along with the dot-com companies. However, demand still exists for the e-commerce technology course—as market demand exists for people with hands-on experience in the latest technology. Many dot-coms may have disappeared, but e-business is definitely here to stay. Our challenge as educators is to determine the best way to deliver this knowledge to students. Integrating e-commerce with non-business-oriented computer science curricula is not a particularly easy task [1]. But since the e-commerce curriculum evolved as an outgrowth of the MIS program, business schools need to define whether to keep an e-commerce program separate, or integrate it into the MIS program. Our experience suggests that without a core faculty taking full responsibility for its upkeep, an e-commerce program cannot survive.

References

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