During the latter part of the 1990s, and especially during 1999, many universities rushed to create courses, certificate programs, and in some cases master’s degrees in electronic commerce. Demanded by students and eagerly sponsored by major corporations and start-up firms alike during the stock market boom, it was widely believed at the time that such e-commerce programs would become a standard part of college curricula in a few years. Many universities started offering courses and programs in online-business strategies, marketing, consumer behavior, customer service, security, privacy, signatures for legal documents, and programming languages.

By 2002, however, interest in e-commerce courses and programs waned and many universities dropped them. E-commerce courses and programs have not disappeared. Indeed, one-quarter of the 282 polled in spring 2001 offered e-business concentrations in their MBA programs. The universities that excel in these are: Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Berkeley, Vanderbilt, Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. In many universities that do not offer specific courses or programs on the subject, e-commerce has in fact found its way as part of core courses on operations management, marketing, technology and strategy. The e-commerce courses that survive focus more on the role of the Internet and e-commerce at traditional (brick-and-mortar) companies.

The pioneer in e-commerce courses and programs among business schools was Vanderbilt. It was there that the first e-commerce course (called “Marketing in Computer-Mediated Environments”) was given in 1994. Today more students specialize in e-commerce at Vanderbilt than in any other program other than finance, but not as a single major but as part of a double-major in another field. The bottom line, of course, is whether taking courses, getting a certificate, or specializing in e-commerce will make students more marketable and find better jobs. Since many corporate recruiters view e-commerce courses are useful but hardly sufficient as a specialization, it is very likely that some e-commerce courses will be given by many universities and a few will also offer it as a full specialization. It is the same as with the dot.com firms: after the initial mad rush some will stay in business and even flourish, but the gold-rush phase is essentially over.

E-Commerce/E-Business MBA Programs are now certified and ranked by the American E-Commerce Association.