Progress Report: Print and Packaging Industry Initiative: Fall 2026

Introduction

Houston's print community identified two converging problems: a shrinking workforce and a decline in print-related classes at schools and universities. In response, the Print and Packaging Industry Initiative was launched in September 2025 as a collaboration among Houston print professionals, the University of Houston (UH) Digital Media Program, and PIA MidAmerica.

The Initiative's mission is to develop a comprehensive, long-term framework to increase student enrollment in print-related courses and reverse workforce shrinkage. The completed framework will be free to use and adapt across North America, so its benefits can extend well beyond Houston.

This report summarizes progress to date and shows how industry support is turning that mission into results.

Three-Pillar Structure

The Initiative is structured as a three-pillar campaign to enhance students' awareness of and interest in print-related studies and careers. The three pillars focus on students, instructors, and industry funding and management.

Progress

Pillars 1 and 2 raised awareness of modern print technology during the start-up year and set the stage for greater student and staff participation in the 2026/27 school year.

Pillar 3 launches in January 2027 to secure management and financial commitments from the print community.

Goal: Grow Houston's workforce by educating students in print, design, substrates, embellishment, color, workflow, AI, CXM, UX, and cost management.

The Print & Packaging Industry Initiative
Growing the Houston Print Workforce
A University of Houston Digital Media, PIA MidAmerica, & Houston Print Industry Collaboration

Pillar 1: Students in Print

The target market is UH students who are enrolling in or already enrolled in the Digital Media Program. Many of these students lacked awareness of modern print technology and ignored print-related courses. Enrollment declines led to the cancellation of print courses.

To address the problem, student Print Ambassadors were tasked with increasing student awareness of the print industry and its career opportunities.

Progress: Students in Print

- The Print Ambassadors raised awareness of the print industry through peer-to-peer outreach, social media content, on-campus signage, print application displays, and classroom discussions.
- 43 students with no prior interest in print attended two PIA MidAmerica events, and one student even drove from Houston to Dallas for the PIA MidAmerica Gala.
- One Ambassador attended Dscoop 2026.
- 68 students participated in six site visits to print companies.
- 42 students attended a Fujifilm/Zimmet Group print embellishment class, and their designs were submitted to Fujifilm's Innovation Print Awards in Japan.
  - ✓ One student won first place in the Young Creator category.
  - ✓ Another student took runner-up honors.
- 12 students applied for internships and jobs at print-related companies.
- One student was hired as a salesperson at a Houston-area print company.
- 108 students attended a presentation on October 19, 2026, about print applications and career opportunities by Blake Peterson of the Peterson Media Group and NextGen Leaders Society and stayed for 30 minutes of Q&A and internship requests.
- Students are inviting local printers to an on-campus event on November 20, 2026, to network with students and discuss the Print and Packaging Industry Initiative.

Pillar 2: Instructors in Print

The UH Digital Media Program's instructors were not fully aware of current print technology and used outdated courseware.

To build awareness, the Initiative arranged for various instructors and staff to attend Printing United 2025, Houston-based industry events, tours of print facilities, and meetings with local and national industry suppliers.

Progress: Instructors in Print

- September 2025: The instructors deepened their understanding of modern printing technology through a guided tour and discussion of Fiserv's advanced, robot-assisted printing facility.
- October 2025: Five instructors attended a PIA MidAmerica event.
- November 2025: One instructor attended an XMPie User Group event and the Printing United Expo 2025 to gain a comprehensive introduction to modern print technologies and applications.
- Throughout the school year, meetings among instructors, industry suppliers, and local printers resulted in support offerings for print-related classes, including:
  - ✓ Fujifilm donated a two-hour print embellishment class, presented by the Zimmet Group, a design consultancy, for 42 students.
  - ✓ XMPie donated the code for a comprehensive, AI-driven, cross-media marketing campaign that students can use to create highly personalized, omnichannel class projects.
  - ✓ 121services, a California cross-media consultancy, donated services to maximize use of the XMPie platform and help students develop their Forever Crimes-style applications.
  - ✓ 1to1printers in Spring, Texas, gave students access to its presses and related technologies to print and finish their class projects.
  - ✓ Donations of case studies and sample output for classroom presentations.
  - ✓ Student tours hosted by six print facilities.

Pillar 3: Printers in Support

During the first year, the Initiative was managed by volunteers from OutputLinks Communications Group and UH's Digital Media Staff. PIA MidAmerica, The Nolan Moore Foundation, and the Print & Graphics Scholarship Foundation provided startup funding.

On January 1, 2027, Pillar 3 will launch to transition the Initiative's funding and management to Houston-area printers and suppliers. Companies that recognize the opportunity of building a consistent workforce capable of supporting sophisticated print technology will be invited to support the Initiative's ongoing programs.

The goal is to raise $60,000 in annual operating funds through monthly company donations of $25 (Friends), $75 (Supporters), and $150 (Advisory Board Members) for at least 24 months. The funds would pay for a part-time manager, courseware materials and enhancements, and student and instructor participation in industry events across North America.

In the future, as more companies recognize the Initiative's value and become donors, funding will steadily increase, sustaining long-term educational assistance programs that will greatly expand Houston's print-educated workforce.

Pledging companies receive branding, recruitment, and recognition commensurate with their level of support. Benefits include logo placement on affiliated LinkedIn Groups, recognition in industry press releases, and supporter signage for display at company headquarters and at UH Digital Media print-related events.

Advisory Board Members may help guide the Initiative's direction, spending, hiring, and supported activities. They can also advise UH instructors and staff on courseware enhancements to ensure course offerings align with industry needs.

Founding Partners

Companies that pledge before January 1, 2027, will be named Founding Partners of the Initiative. To inquire about Founding Partner status, contact Andy & Julie Plata at PLATAs@OutputLinksCG.com.