The Internship Imperative: Strenthening New England's Talent Pipeline

Tuesday, November 10, 2026
UMass Club - Boston, MA

AGENDA

8:00 a.m.	**Registration & Networking**
8:30 a.m.	**Welcome Remarks** James T. Brett, President & CEO, The New England Council Michael Thomas, President & CEO, New England Board of Higher Education
8:40 a.m.	**Presentation of "The Internship Imperative" Report** Carlo Salerno, Managing Director of Education Insights Burning Class Institute
9:00 a.m.	**Panel Discussion** *Moderator:* Kevin Grubb - Vice President, Work-Based Learning, Strada Education Foundation *Panelists:* Bryan Cain, Ph.D. - President, Endicott College Joseph Fava - Partner, PwC Daniel Hackett - Data Coordinator, St. Mary's Center for Women & Children, 2025 NEC Fellow Oza Nunnally - Graduate Student, UMass Boston, 2026 NEC Fellow
10:00 a.m.	**Adjourn**

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SPEAKER & PANEL BIOGRAPHIES

James T. Brett
President & CEO, The New England Council

James T. Brett is the President and Chief Executive Officer of The New England Council, the nation's oldest regional business association. Mr. Brett was appointed to this position by the Council's Board of Directors in October 1996.

Under Mr. Brett's leadership, The New England Council has become the region's premier business advocacy and networking association. During his tenure, revenues have grown significantly, membership has increased tenfold, and the organization has expanded its programming to offer upwards of 60 events annually throughout the six New England states and in Washington, DC. The Council is widely respected by business leaders and policymakers alike for its non-partisan, consensus-based approach to policy advocacy. As a result, in recent years, Mr. Brett has led the Council's successful and impactful federal advocacy on a wide range of critical economic issues, including energy, financial services, healthcare, education and workforce development, technology, transportation, trade, and more.

Prior to joining the Council, Mr. Brett served for 15 years as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. During that time, he served as a Chairman of several of the most influential committees in the Massachusetts legislature, including the Committee on Banking, the Committee on Taxation, and the Joint Committee on Congressional Redistricting. As a State Representative, Mr. Brett's legislative priorities included providing tax relief for key Massachusetts industries, creating high-wage jobs, developing and retaining a skilled workforce, and fostering an overall business climate that supports economic growth and prosperity for all residents.

Mr. Brett has been a lifelong champion for people with disabilities. In May 2022, President Joe Biden appointed him to serve as the Chair of the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PCPID). He previously served on PCPID under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, including a term as Chairman from 2011 – 2013. In 2016, Congress appointed him to the National Council on Disability, and he currently serves as Vice Chairman. He is also currently the Chair of the Governor's Commission on Intellectual Disability, and the Chair of the Massachusetts Disabled Persons Protection Commission. In 2013, the University of Massachusetts Boston established the James T. Brett Chair in Disability and Workforce Development, the nation's only endowed chair in disability and workforce development. In 1996, Bay Cove Human Services of Boston named a new community home for disabled adults "Brett House" in his honor.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Brett has received numerous awards and honors in recognition of his achievements and contributions. Some highlights from recent years include:

- Michael and Kitty Dukakis Lifetime Achievement Award, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (2018)
- Junior Achievement of Northern New England Hall of Fame (2018)
- Action for Boston Community Development, Inc., Hall of Fame (2016)
- Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Tim Russert Award (2015)
- Special Olympics of Massachusetts Hall of Fame (2014)
- Edward M. Kennedy Leadership Award, Disability Law Center (2014)
- Hospice of Boston Humanitarian of the Year (1989)

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Mr. Brett has been named to the Boston Business Journal's "50 Most Influential Bostonians" list on several occasions in recent years. He is the recipient of 17 honorary degrees from institutions including Anna Maria College, Bridgewater State University, New England College, Saint Anselm College, Suffolk University, and Westfield State University.

Mr. Brett holds degrees from American University, Suffolk University, and Harvard University. Jim was born and raised in Dorchester, MA, where he currently resides with his wife, Patricia. In his spare time, Jim volunteers at the Maryann Brett Food Pantry at Saint Theresa Parish, named in memory of his mother.

Michael K. Thomas
President & CEO
New England Board of Higher Education

Michael K. Thomas is the President and CEO of the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) in Boston, Massachusetts, a regional organization working with the 260 colleges and universities in the six New England states. NEBHE works to expand education opportunity and services and to address issues related to New England's human capital and economic competitiveness.

Dr. Thomas directs NEBHE's policy, research, publishing, programmatic and fundraising activities. These focus on promoting innovative K-12, postsecondary and lifelong learning policies and on expanding collaboration among leaders of business, government and education. He works extensively in state political and higher education environments with governors, state legislators, K-12 commissioners, state higher education executives (SHEEO's) and with business leaders to expand college readiness, access and success. He also oversees NEBHE's collaborative cost-saving programs, including the Regional Student Program's "Tuition Break."

Thomas joined NEBHE in 2002 as Director of Policy and Research. He subsequently served as Senior Director and Senior Vice President. In the latter roles, he oversaw the development and implementation of NEBHE's "College Ready New England" initiative, collaborating with senior leaders of government, business and education (K-12 and post secondary) in the six New England states to promote policy strategies and best practices to expand college readiness and success.

Thomas has worked in corporate training and human resources and held varied administrative positions in higher education institutions, both public and private. He served as a Policy Aid in the University of Massachusetts President's Office and subsequently as Coordinator of Institutional Research and as Executive Assistant to the President at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

He holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Brigham Young University and master's degrees in higher education from Teachers College, Columbia University and Harvard University. He earned a doctorate in education and social policy from Harvard University and an M.B.A. from Boston University. He has held several university faculty appointments, currently teaching at Harvard University in the Continuing Education Division's Graduate Management Program. He is a trustee of New England College and served as trustee and vice chair of the board of Worcester State University.

Thomas frequently lectures and speaks on issues related to K-12 and post secondary education policy, regional and global competitiveness, the internationalization of higher education, college readiness and the economic impact of higher education.

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Carlos Salerno
Managing Director of Education Insights
Burning Glass Institute

Carlo Salerno is Managing Director of Education Insights at the Burning Glass Institute where he leads the Institute's portfolio of research around the economics of postsecondary training programs.

Carlo is an education economist who over the past 22 years has built a career studying and developing solutions related to how students, colleges, and governments can improve access, completion, and affordability outcomes. He began his career as a senior higher education analyst with the U.S. Government Accountability Office and since then has gone on to co-found a boutique education analytics firm and conduct major research studies for both national financial aid and student lending advocacy organizations.

Before joining the Burning Glass Institute, Carlo was Vice President for Research at Campuslogic, where he led ed-tech research on improving the delivery of student financial aid. Prior to that, Carlo served as Vice President for Analytics at the Strada Education Network. He is routinely quoted in national and education trade media outlets and is a frequent speaker at education finance and enrollment management conferences. Carlo earned his bachelor's degree at Eastern Michigan University and his Ph.D. from the Pennsylvania State University.

Kevin Grubb
Vice President, Work-Based Learning
Strada Education Foundation

Kevin Grubb is an education leader with expertise in career development, institutional change, and industry partnerships. As Vice President of Work-Based Learning at Strada Education Foundation, he leads efforts to scale high-quality work-based learning experiences, including paid internships and apprenticeships, by partnering with postsecondary institutions, employers, and policymakers. Previously, Kevin served as the inaugural Chief Career Officer at Villanova University where he designed innovative career pathways and employer engagement strategies. His work has influenced national conversations on the role of postsecondary education in preparing students for the workforce, and he is a sought-after speaker and advisor on these topics.

As a consultant and coach, Kevin has worked with higher education leaders to drive transformational change, guiding them in implementing strategies that improve student career outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Kevin holds a BS in Psychology from St. Joseph's University, MA in Higher Education Administration from New York University, and a Certificate in Leadership in Performance Coaching from Brown University. He is a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation, a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach, and is certified to administer the Hogan, DISC, and CliftonStrengths assessments with individuals and teams. Kevin is also a Certified Financial Education Instructor℠, designated by the National Financial Educators Council.

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Bryan D. Cain, Ph.D.
President
Endicott College

Bryan D. Cain, Ph.D., is the eighth President of Endicott College.
A seasoned higher education leader with extensive experience in leading institutional advancement, student affairs, strategic planning, and communications and marketing, he brings deep institutional knowledge and a proven track record of leadership at a pivotal moment for higher education.

Dr. Cain was named Acting President by the Endicott College Board of Trustees in April 2025 and subsequently appointed Interim President in October 2025. After a presidential search process in partnership with AGB Search, he was unanimously voted President in March 2026.

During his tenure as Acting and Interim President, Endicott celebrated several transformative milestones, including the opening of the new Admissions Welcome Center; the successful branding and national promotion of the Endicott Experiential Edge across major media outlets, including Chronicle and The Boston Globe; record-breaking undergraduate and graduate application volume; and the completion of major renovations to the Wylie Center and Tupper Manor. He also expanded student support services to increase first-year retention, dedicated resources to expand the faculty, launched the development of a new Innovation Complex, and helped steward Endicott's first $75 million comprehensive fundraising campaign, adding more than $11 million to the campaign total since May 2025.

Before becoming Interim President, Dr. Cain served as the Executive Vice President of Endicott College, acting as senior advisor, chief of staff, and strategic partner to the President.

With a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership from Endicott College, Dr. Cain's research focuses on the university president search process, particularly the responsibility of Boards of Trustees in developing a succession plan for institutional leadership. His expertise in strategic resource allocation, governance, and mission-driven growth ensures that Endicott continues to thrive in an evolving higher education landscape.

A first-generation college graduate, Dr. Cain is deeply committed to access, student success, and the development of students as "whole citizens." Known for his collaborative leadership style, open-door philosophy, and an emphasis on outcomes-driven innovation, he continues to drive Endicott's mission forward with clarity, care, and purpose.

Dr. Cain serves on the boards of the LGBTQ Leaders in Higher Education and the Society of Presidential Scholars in Academia.

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Joseph Fava
Partner, PWC

Joe is an audit partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers. His focus is serving clients and leading audits in the asset and wealth management space. This includes asset managers and investment funds - both public and private. Joe's career at PwC began as an intern PwC's Boston office and has included 2 years working in London serving, a mix of multi-national and U.K based managers. He is a proud graduate of Boston College and lives on the north shore with his wife and 3 kids. Joe is an avid sailor - in his free time you will likely find him competing off Marblehead.

Daniel Hackett
Data Coordinator, St. Mary's Center for Women & Children
2025 New England Council Fellow

Daniel Hackett is a Reading, MA, native, and a 2026 graduate of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA, where he received his B.A. in Economics and Political Science. In the summer of 2025, Daniel was selected as a New England Council Fellow, and he completed his fellowship at St. Mary's Center for Women & Children in Dorchester, MA, a multi-service organization serving women and families experiencing homelessness and poverty. Daniel continued to work part-time for St. Mary's Center during his senior year of college, and upon graduation, was offered a permanent, full-time position. Daniel now serves as Data Coordinator, where he partners with program leadership to translate social services data into strategic agency-wide insights. While pursuing his education, Daniel also completed internships at CTP Boston, an advertising, PR, and digital agency, and JJ Ruddy Insurance Agency.

Oza Nunally
Graduate Student at University of Massachusetts, Boston
2026 New England Council Fellow

Oza Nunnally is a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, where she is pursuing a Masters degree in Urban Planning and Community Development. A native of Springfield, MA, Oza received her B.A in Ethnic and Gender Studies from Westfield State University. During the summer of 2026, Oza was selected as a New England Council Fellow, and she completed her fellowship at the Freedom House in Boston, a community-based non-profit organization inspiring Black Brown and Immigrant students to graduate high school & college. During her fellowship, Oza supported the planning, coordination, and daily implementation of Freedom House's Summer Learning Institute and related youth programming. While pursing her education, Oza has also worked as a Success and Engagement Specialist at the Opportunity Academy in Holyoke, MA, and as an AmeriCorps Member at DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services in Greenfield, MA.