Dr. Pam Eddinger immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong at the age of 11 and grew up in Miami, Florida. She serves as President of Bunker Hill Community College, the largest community college in Massachusetts, with approximately 14,000 students enrolled each semester. Sixty-four percent of the students are people of color and more than half of BHCC's students are women. The college also enrolls more than 900 international students who come from approximately 100 countries and speak more than 75 languages. Under her leadership, Bunker Hill was named a co-winner of Achieving the Dream’s Leah Meyer Austin Award in 2014 for its excellent work around student success.
FSE: What led you into the world of higher education?

EDDINGER: I immigrated to the states when I was 11 with my family. I have always known one of the reasons for coming to the United States was to ensure education opportunities for me, my brother and my sister. Even though my parents did not go to college, there was always the expectation that the children would complete college and reach higher.

I began with Pre-Med, then Journalism and finally chose English as my undergraduate major. I completed my doctorate in Japanese Literature and Chinese Philosophy, thinking I would research and teach. My stop at community college was meant to be a short one, earning a living while completing my Ph.D., but telling the stories of my students, and realizing the impact community college makes for them, their family and our community-at-large convinced me that this could be my life’s work.

Community college is a uniquely American institution that speaks to the purest spirit of democracy and inclusion; it embodies all of the ideals I hold dear about our country. Lots of things led me to higher education, but it is that spirit of hope and opportunity that made me stay in community college work.

FSE: How do you view the role of community colleges?

EDDINGER: Community colleges educate half of the undergraduates in our country. Our students are the bedrock of the American workforce, and the tax base of our communities and our economy. Investment in community colleges will yield a nimble workforce, and a diverse citizenry with a global perspective. We generate value. We are a public good.

FSE: Tell us about BHCC, how long it’s been serving students and what the student body is like?

EDDINGER: We are in the heart of Boston, and the largest of 15 excellent community colleges in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We just celebrated our 40th anniversary two years ago.

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) serves 14,000 students a semester, and 20,000 a year, offering short-term certificate and associate degrees. Some of our graduates enter the workforce immediately in high demand fields such as business, the sciences, IT or health care; others transfer to four-year universities.

We have slightly more female students, and are diverse in our student profiles—24% each Caucasian, Latino and African American students, 12% Asian and 13% with more than one designation. The average age of our students is 27. Four out of five students work, and three out of five are parents. Many are the first in their family to attend college.

We have two campuses and a number of satellite locations and instructional sites in the Greater Boston community. We are proud of our partnerships within business and industry, community-based organizations and our feeder high schools.

FSE: Tell us about the new agreement between BHCC and Boston Education Skills & Training Corp. (BEST Corp.).

EDDINGER: In spring 2017, Boston Education Skills & Training (BEST) Corporation approached BHCC to review the possibility of articulating the BEST Room Attendant program with BHCC credits. BEST faculty submitted their curriculum to BHCC Hospitality Department Chair MaryBeth Barton who reviewed it with her faculty and confirmed that students could be eligible for up to 12 BHCC credits.

Given that BEST is not an accredited program, students interested in BHCC credits need to enroll at the college, participate in an orientation and submit their standard portfolio from BEST to the Prior Learning Assessment office for evaluation and approval.

FSE: Has BHCC ever entered into a program like this previously?

EDDINGER: Not quite… however, we are currently developing an articulation agreement with Year-Up that will be somewhat similar.
FSE: What do students who take part receive?

EDDINGER: Students receive 12 BHCC credits in:

- Principles of Management and Service in Hospitality – HRT-121 (3 credits)
- Advanced Lodging Operations – HRT-231 (3 credits)
- Hospitality Seminar – HRT-105 (3 credits)
- Hospitality Internship – HRT-210 (3 credits)

FSE: What do you view as the “secret of success” in your career?

EDDINGER: To live in kindness, and to learn from others. That’s it.

FSE: What’s happening in the hotel world in Boston that was part of the reason BHCC entered into this?

EDDINGER: With the opening of the Wynn Hotel and Casino, we anticipate there will be more employment opportunities in the hospitality industry. The articulation agreement between BEST Corp. and BHCC is a great way to train the workforce and offer individuals a path for advancement within the field.

FSE: What will the rewards/benefits for students who participate?

EDDINGER: Completing an associate degree is now an attainable goal for students who can start their college education having essentially completed the equivalent of a semester.

FSE: Do you anticipate more/similar programs such as this down the road?

EDDINGER: Traditionally, BHCC has entered into articulation agreements with four-year institutions to help our students continue on to complete a bachelor degree. This inspired us to consider articulation agreements with others, such as the agreement with Year-Up that is currently in the works, in ways we may not have before, in turn making a college education accessible to a lot more students.

FSE: BHCC’s “motto” is “Imagine the possibilities.” What do you see as the possibilities benefitting students who take part in this new program?

EDDINGER: This is the first step into a new career. It is the first of many opportunities to come. We expect students to build on their knowledge, their confidence and learn to advance. The future is theirs to shape and enjoy.