Jess: Thanks for joining us today, for our latest parent and family webinar. My name is Jess Tallant and I am the Parent and Family Programs Coordinator here at Oregon State University. Today, I have Emily Bowling with us. She is the Assistant Director for Civic Engagement and Sustainability. We are happy that you decided to join us. Emily is going to touch upon a few things today regarding civic engagement and opportunities for you and your student. So, to get us started Emily, do you want to introduce yourself and talk a little bit about who you are and what you do at OSU?

Emily: Sure, thanks so much for having me, Jess. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to connect with OSU parents and families. So, I serve as an Assistant Director in Student Leadership and Involvement here at Oregon State University. I’ve been here 7 years now. My primary responsibility is overseeing our Center for Civic Engagement. So, we are really focused on fostering social responsibility for students and getting students engaged in the local community surrounding campus. That largely happens through us building reciprocal partnerships with local non-profit and government agencies and getting students involved, largely through service and service learning.

Jess: Awesome! So, could you tell us a little bit about what civic engagement is?

Emily: Absolutely. So, civic engagement is a term that we do a lot of work with students to kind of expand their understanding and notion of what civic engagement is. A lot of students, in higher school or in other facets of their life, have been involved in volunteering or service in some way. Civic engagement is just a broader term that really is about being invested in the condition of your community. So, our work is based on the belief that we all have the power and ability to influence and impact our community. We want students to be really intentional about what that impact is. So, civic engagement is having a heightened awareness and responsibility for the community in which you live. And civic engagement includes a broad scope and range of activities. And so it includes things like, direct service, activism and advocacy, philanthropy and giving, it includes working to be educated on different social issues. That can come through news readership; it includes voting in political activities, so we do partner with student government in voter registration as well as voter education engagement efforts. We also talk with students about the ways that lifestyle choices and vocational choice can actually be a form of civic engagement and
contributing to communities. So, a lot of people’s professional work, whether you maybe are researching a pressing social issue, or you are a teacher, or a firefighter, or a nurse, or a doctor; these are all professions that can contribute positively to your community and to folks lives. In addition, to things like choosing to use a reusable water bottle or a reusable mug and some of lifestyle choices like that. So, we really do a lot of work to help students expand their notion and understanding of what civic engagement is and help to see the many, many ways they can positively impact their community in different spheres of their life.

Jess: Awesome! So could you talk to us a little bit about what the action continuum is?

Emily: Absolutely. So, a lot of the work we do in the Center for Civic Engagement, we often use a river analogy to work with students to look at social issues. A lot of work is what I call downstream relief efforts. That is things like picking up litter or doing a park clean-up or providing food at a soup kitchen for folks who are experiencing food insecurity. So, the action continuum is something that helps student thing about, what is a short-term relief effort and what might long term change look like? So, it is important to do those downstream relief efforts, but we want students to also think about what might long term change look like. So there is a famous proverb; if you give a person a fish that eat for a day, if you teach someone to fish they can eat for a lifetime. So, we want students to look at social issues and of what are the symptoms and what might the root cause be. So, other than direct service, what are the other ways I can influence this social issue that I care about through upstream intervention and through possible structural changes, and possibly policy adjustments, and prevent that need from existing in the first place. So, the action continuum and the river analogy are things that we use with students to help them analyze and critically think about social issues.

Jess: That is awesome. So, could you tell us a little bit about the benefits, why students should get involved?

Emily: Absolutely. First and foremost, civic engagement is really a form of experiential learning. So, it is a way, its active, and it is a way where students can typically tangibly see the impact of their actions real time. And so, I think that civic engagement is really powerful because helps make learning relevant because it is situated in real-world scenarios and real-world context in the communities in which are students are living. It makes learning relevant and it also helps to increase agency or self-efficacy for students in terms of them gaining confidence in the belief that they can make a difference and they are making a difference. So, it allows students to impact change in their areas of passion or interest, to feel a sense of accomplishment, students are also able to understand social issues on a deeper level. Civic engagement is a wonderful way to build community and find new friends and peers who care about the
same issues as you. You can network with local professionals who are doing great work in our local community as well as meet folks across campus that you might have not met otherwise because you both care about invasive species removal or environmental conservation or housing security. So, that is really powerful. Other benefits include; students can explore different career paths. So, if you are interested in animal welfare you can volunteer at a local humane society or you might volunteer with habitat for humanity and so you can talk to folks who are doing different types of work within the community. So, it is really great for networking and for students to explore their values and possible careers options. In addition to the many, many skills, students can gain through the experience. So, it is something that is great to have on your resume. I don’t think it should be the primary reason why you get involved in your community, but it certainly does not hurt to help set you apart in terms of what your value is for community. It is great for resume building, but also you are gaining skills in collaboration and teamwork, and critical thinking and exposure to diversity of ideas and diversity of people. There is a lot of different career readiness and leadership skills that are gained through civic engagement.

**Jess:** So, those all sound like wonderful things would certainly make anyone want to be involved. But can you also talk a little bit about how this is impacting students personally, as far as well-being?

**Emily:** Absolutely. So, I mentioned a little bit already about the ability to build social connections through civic engagement, but there is actually a lot of holistic well-being benefits to being engaged in your community. There is actually a lot of research around volunteering and community engagement and an increased sense of happiness because of the connection to a greater sense of purpose or a greater sense of meaning and being connected to something larger than yourself. So, there is a lot of mental health benefits and feelings of happiness that are connected to community engagement. A lot of forms of civic engagement and community engagement lend themselves to a more active lifestyle. So, we actually have students report “I didn’t realize I was going to get a little bit of a workout out doing the park restoration, or invasive species removal, or painting.” So, sometimes with litter clean-ups folks are out walking all around campus or the community doing the litter clean ups and so sometimes there is actually the physical exercise that can come with it as well.

**Jess:** Awesome. Do you want to touch upon the Center for Civic Engagement’s mission and goals?

**Emily:** Sure. I think I hit upon this quite a bit earlier but I’ll just elaborate a little. So, our office is based on the premise that we believe students can change the world. I know it sounds really idealistic and lofty but I definitely get up every day because I believe that. One of our tag lines is “Imagine a better world. Make it happen.” So, we are really here to help connect students interests and passions with needs within
our local community and to help students identify and progress their vision of a better, more caring, more equitable world. So, we do that by connecting students to local service opportunities, philanthropy, advocacy, and also engaging them in dialogue and critical social issues. I think that kind of summarizes our mission.

**Jess:** So what opportunities are available to parents and family members as far as getting involved with their student in being a part of civic engagement?

**Emily:** Yeah, so something that I feel really proud of is, our office; families and parents are actually able to participate in all of our programming. We do a lot of large days of service where students can register and sign up for anywhere between 6 and 12 different service projects in the community. When students are registering, they have the option of adding dependents or adding additional adults. So, that can be partners, that can be children, that could be nieces and nephews, that can be parents, uncles, grandparents. We really want to make engaging in the community as accessible as possible. For students that often means including their families. So, if you are on campus or are visiting your student at a time when we have one of our events, you can ask your student to register you along with them. All of our services projects, again, are open to families. Some have age restrictions but we always several projects that are youth friendly as well, so sometimes depending on the task, like doing habitat builds is not typically youth friendly, but a lot of our garden projects are youth friendly, as well.

**Jess:** Do you want to talk about the days of service?

**Emily:** Sure! Our large days of service; we typically do about two per term. Fall Into Service Day and Make a Difference Day happen in fall term. MLK Day of Service and Animal Action Day happen in winter term. Then we do Earth Day and a Day of Caring with our local United Way chapter in spring term. So, Earth Day is pretty thematically associated with environmental conservation and restoration. And all the other days of service, well actually, Animal Action Day is also focus on animal welfare. But all the other days of service have a really diverse array of social issues that students can engage with and the service projects can typically accommodate anywhere from 10 volunteers to some of our projects can take 50-60 volunteers.

**Jess:** Fantastic. Could you talk a little bit about programs and events that you offer?

**Emily:** Absolutely! We do awareness weeks throughout the year. So, in the fall we do Hunger and Homelessness Awareness or Action week with the Human Services and Resource Center on campus. We
do a Non-profit and Public Service Fair in winter term; that is a collaboration with the Career Development Center for students to explore nonprofit and public service as career options. So, that’s showcasing volunteer and internship and job opportunities in the non-profit and public service fields. We do Alternative Break, which is very near and dear to my heart that is by far our most transformative program where students can really do a deep dive, travel to regional locations, and engage in team building sessions, and reflective sessions, and cooking meals together, and doing direct service projects together, and meeting with local community leaders. So, that is a real intense leadership development week. One that is often very transformative for students where they might reconsider what their major is and how they sort of see themselves contributing to the world. We also do a program called, Growing Food Security where students can get involved in helping to grow food for our food pantry on campus and so that is really exciting as well.

**Jess:** Awesome. So, I know Alternative Spring Break is near and dear to your heart. Did you want to want to touch upon some of the trips that are going to be coming up this year?

**Emily:** Sure! We do three trips over spring break. One to southern Oregon that is focused on environmental conservation and restoration and students get to stay in a net zero energy ranch, which is really neat. There is a trip down to the Bay Area in San Francisco that is focused on housing and food insecurity. And then there is a trip up to Yakima, WA, central Washington that is focused on immigration and cultural engagement; so looking at land use by the local Latino or Latinx community or the Yakima nation, the tribe up there. Then in June, we do a trip to central Oregon with our Warm Springs extension office that is focused sort of on indigenous policy and engagement. Students get a really broad overview of tribal life and customs there. It is a really unique opportunity for students to spend the week on the native American reservation.

**Jess:** Awesome. So I noticed Dot on your previous slide on Programs and Events. Could you expand a little bit on that for us?

**Emily:** Sure! Dot is a program that we are really looking to grow on campus. To be a signature program where we want everyone to realize that creating social change feels really overwhelming and daunting. DOT stands for “do one thing.” So, what we want is for students to really think about a social issue they care a lot about and pick one thing that they can commit to doing. So, that might be, “I’m going to carry a reusable water bottle every day and reduce my waste” or “I’m going to commit to tutoring and working with a local elementary school for an hour to two hours each week.” So, we work with students to identify what there issue of passion and what is one thing that they can start doing to work towards the community
or world that they want to live in. So, we like to think if we connect all the dots, if we get everyone on campus to do one thing we can really create an unbelievable sort of movement and ripple effect of positivity and community building.

**Jess:** Awesome. So as we start to wrap up, I know there are some other services that you provide as well. Do you want to speak on that?

**Emily:** Sure! So, we do what I call community engagement or community advising consultations with students. So, we will, we have a request form on our website and we are happy to sit down 1:1 with students and talk through what are their interests and passions, what’s there availability like? What type of transportation do they have and not have and play a matchmaker in connecting them with the community agency that would be able to match as their needs. We also do that for student organizations. So, if a student is in a Greek chapter or organization, we will work the entire organization or a few representatives of the organization to find projects and opportunities that meet the goals and objectives of that student organization. We do workshops and trainings that look at allowing students to critically analyze a social issue or that can help empower students on creating their own community service or reflective activities. We also have a tracking system so if students want to create a community or civic engagement portfolio they can start tracking all their activities when they get to campus and then have that as something they can include in a resume or be a supplement to their resume showing all the ways they’ve been engaged in the community during their time at OSU.

**Jess:** That is really nice. Alright, so some last opportunities. Alright, so we have some contact information here that Emily was willing to provide. For the Center for Civic Engagement. So, if you do have any questions, specifically about the presentation today, or opportunities that you can get involved with, whether that is with you student or opportunities for your student, please feel free to reach out. There is also opportunities to check out their website. You can email questions in to them. But, also you can keep an eye out for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts. Thank you Emily for being with us today. You can also stay tuned, there will be a calendar attachment with this webinar for any supplemental dates that you may need to mark on your calendars. So we hope that we will see you around campus in the community, near and far! Thanks for tuning in.

**Emily:** Thanks, Jess! Thanks for listening everyone!