

Customer Success Story

Santa Fe College

United States | Higher Education | Blackthorn Events · Blackthorn Messaging

Part One

About Santa Fe College

[Santa Fe College](#) is a public state college in Gainesville, Florida, serving approximately 18,500 students annually across North Central Florida. Nearly two-thirds of those students attend part-time, nearly a third are first-generation college students, and about 60% are pursuing an A.A. degree with plans to transfer to a university, making access, clarity, and connection central to everything Santa Fe does.

Student recruitment at Santa Fe operates at the intersection of data and human connection. The team runs an ambitious calendar of events, from large-scale open houses welcoming more than 1,500 visitors to ongoing campus tour programs, freshman orientations like Santa Fe Live, and community-facing enrollment events. Getting the right students through the door and ensuring the experience they have upon arrival is welcoming, organized, and data-rich is mission-critical work.

Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment, has been building that data infrastructure at Santa Fe for over 13 years, serving as the college's primary Salesforce administrator since first bringing the platform to campus. Robert Gregory, Recruitment Events Coordinator, leads a four-person team that manages the day-to-day execution of those events, supported by eight college coaches embedded in local high schools, 12 student ambassadors, and a group of educational aides and work-study students. Together, they are the engine behind how Santa Fe connects with prospective students.

Part Two

The Challenge

Before Blackthorn Events, Santa Fe's event management stitched together a rotating cast of third-party platforms, each with its own limitations, and none of them connected to

Salesforce. For years, the team relied on Agendize, a platform that has since disappeared from the market entirely. They then moved to Visit Days, a tool commonly used in higher education, and turned to WHOVA for complex multi-session events like Open House.

Visit Days offered little flexibility. Every event had to conform to the platform's constraints rather than Santa Fe's needs, a hard limit for a team running everything from intimate 80-person Senior Night events to campus-wide open houses with food partners, session tracks, and hundreds of families.

"There was just no ability to customize it at all."

– Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

WHOVA was frustrating in a different way. It offered a full feature set on paper, then put the most useful capabilities behind additional paywalls. "It would nickel and dime you," Rob Gregory recalled. "You could see all these great things, but you couldn't access them unless you paid more." Costs ballooned far beyond the team's budget, a recurring pattern that proved difficult for a resource-constrained institution to sustain.

Perhaps most critically, none of these tools fully integrated with Salesforce. Every event registration lived in its own silo, disconnected from the CRM where recruitment and enrollment outcomes were tracked. For a team whose whole mission is moving students from interest to enrollment, that gap wasn't just an inconvenience; it was a barrier to understanding which events actually drove results.

And at check-in, the operational gap was visible in real time: six or seven staff members walking a line at Open House, scrolling iPads, matching faces to lists, hardly the first impression a recruitment team wants to make.

Part Three

Why Santa Fe College Chose Blackthorn

The timeline that led to Blackthorn was part conviction, part crisis.

As a member of Salesforce's North American Higher Ed Advisory Council, Quinten had been watching Blackthorn from the sidelines for nearly two years. Seeing peer institutions, including [Smith College](#), present their implementations had already convinced him it was the right direction. The question was timing.

"When I saw it two years before we ever implemented it, I was like, yeah, that's where I want us to be."

– Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

Then Visit Days forced the issue. The platform was cutting Santa Fe off at the end of their fiscal year on June 30, no extension, no goodwill period. Campus tours were already on the calendar. The team needed a solution immediately.

What made Blackthorn the obvious answer wasn't just urgency; it was architecture. Being a native Salesforce application meant there was no integration layer to maintain, no data handoffs, and no reconciliation work. Events would live in the same system where recruitment outcomes were already being tracked.

Quinten put it plainly: *"Recognizing that we could move to a native-based Salesforce solution like Blackthorn made that decision very easy."*

The team worked directly with the Blackthorn support team; no implementation partner was needed. Blackthorn got Santa Fe live in nearly a day, processing a signed contract even before payment had cleared, so campus tours stayed on schedule without a single gap.

"I was convinced two years before we got there, but I'm happy we're there now."

– Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

Part Four

From Six Staff at a Clipboard to Three Scanning QR Codes

HOW SANTA FE COLLEGE LEVERAGES BLACKTHORN EVENTS

Campus Tours: A Template Built Once, Still Running Strong

The first major win came almost immediately. Rob built a campus tour event template during the first days of onboarding, and Santa Fe has used it ever since. Tour groups and individual visitors register online, receive automated confirmations with QR codes, and check in on arrival, all of which feed directly into Salesforce. The results speak for themselves: more than 94% of students who attend a weekday campus tour apply to Santa Fe, and approximately 80% of those students ultimately enroll.



"We still use that same template that we set up when we first did it, a couple of years ago, and it's worked perfectly."

– Robert Gregory, Recruitment Events Coordinator

Build Once, Adjust Forever: Templates That Scale

One of Blackthorn Events' most practical advantages has been the way it fits into Santa Fe's recurring event calendar. Custom registration forms, reports, and email confirmation templates are configured once, built to the college's exact requirements, and then require only minor adjustments for each new event. There is no rebuilding from scratch, no wondering whether an untested workflow will hold up under pressure.

"Creating each new event gets easier and easier, and that's due to the way that Blackthorn works within Salesforce. I can create custom reports and registration questions specific to our college and, once set up, make minor edits and adjustments as needed for each event. It takes maybe a third of the time to build and manage an event than it used to – particularly for recurring events."

– Robert Gregory, Recruitment Events Coordinator

The same principle applies to email templates: confirmation messages and follow-up campaigns are set up once and reliably reproduced, event after event, without the anxiety that something might not work. For a small team managing a high volume of events across multiple departments, that reliability is as valuable as the time savings.

Open House: Transforming the Biggest Event of the Year

Open House is Santa Fe's flagship annual recruitment event, drawing more than 1,500 visitors to campus, including 650 prospective students, as well as food partners, session tracks, student ambassadors, and college-wide logistics to coordinate. It is also, by the data, a critical conversion moment.

Open House outcomes: 85%+ of attendees apply · 70-75% enroll · "A critical and more or less final conversion event"

The check-in transformation at Open House was immediate and dramatic. Before Blackthorn Events, check-in required six or seven staff members to walk the line with iPads, scrolling through names and matching faces to lists. With Blackthorn's QR code check-in, that dropped to two or three people, and Quinten estimates the process now runs three times faster than it did before.

Check-in staff: 6–7 people → 2–3 people · Speed: 3× faster · Staff efficiency: improved by at least 50%

The ripple effect extended beyond the check-in table. Staff freed from check-in duty could be redeployed to support other parts of the event within minutes rather than an hour. Santa Fe's 12 student ambassadors, who had previously been handed iPads to help manage the line, could now focus entirely on human connection: touring families, starting conversations, and making the kind of peer-to-peer impression that actually moves enrollment decisions.

"Because we can check in people so quickly, I know exactly how to deploy staff at an event. We were able to create a more welcoming atmosphere — the people didn't have to hurry. Scan, you're here, welcome to Santa Fe College."

— Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

An Unexpected Win: Turning a Food Partner's Loss Into Profit

Accurate registration data created an unexpected benefit for one of Santa Fe's campus partners. The on-campus Subway had historically taken a loss at Open House, opening on Saturdays as a goodwill gesture toward its partnership with the college. With Blackthorn Events providing reliable headcounts, the restaurant knew 1,500 people were coming and could finally prepare appropriately. The result: Subway went from losing money at Open House to making a profit.

"Our Subway has gone from taking a loss at Open House to actually making a profit, in part because we're able to give them more accurate numbers of what to expect."

— Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

Real-Time Reporting to Leadership

Event data no longer lives in an external tool that leadership can't access. During the promotional and registration window for major events, Quinten and Rob pull reports weekly through Blackthorn and Salesforce, then daily as the event approaches. For large Open House events, Quinten delivers live reports to college leadership during the event itself and a full summary immediately after. That data then feeds into tracking student enrollment progress and follow-on interest in campus tours, New Student Preview Days, and other touchpoints across the recruitment funnel.

Cross-Departmental Event Support

Santa Fe's Advancement team was among the first to expand beyond the recruitment office, benefiting from a staff member who had already trained on Blackthorn Events and carried that knowledge over on their move to Advancement. The Career and Technical Education team has also used the platform for its own events, with Rob and his team building and managing them on its behalf.

The model has become a quiet service layer: other departments send their event requirements, session details, and reporting needs. In return, they get a fully configured event, registration form, confirmation email, attendee list, and post-event reports, without needing to touch Salesforce directly.

As Rob put it: *"If we were trying to do that for them without having Blackthorn, it would take us forever."*

Portable Check-In: Saying Goodbye to the Laptop

For Rob, the practical change has been personally liberating. He used to bring a laptop to every check-in event as a fallback for manual registration or name lookups. Blackthorn Events and the mobile check-in app eliminated that entirely, and he can now process check-ins faster than most attendees can find their confirmation email. Walk-ins simply scan a QR code and fill out the form on the spot; Rob sees the registration instantly.

"It's completely eliminated [bringing a laptop], which has been fantastic. It's almost like a toolbox that you can use, and you can put together something from all these different pieces."

— Robert Gregory, Recruitment Events Coordinator

Part Five

The Impact: Data That Drives Enrollment

The numbers at Santa Fe College tell a clear story. More than 85% of Open House attendees apply to the college. Between 70 and 75% enroll. For campus tours, the figures are even higher: more than 94% apply, and roughly 80% enroll. These aren't passive events; they are, in Quinten's words, "critical and more or less final conversion events." And Blackthorn Events is the infrastructure that makes them run.

Campus Tour: 94%+ apply · ~80% enroll Open House: 85%+ apply · 70-75% enroll

Beyond conversion, the shift in data quality has entirely changed how the team thinks about events. Before Blackthorn, registration data lived in disconnected external tools, were unavailable for analysis, and were impossible to connect to enrollment outcomes. Today, every registration, check-in, and attendee profile is captured natively in Salesforce, ready to be cross-referenced with application and enrollment records.

"Now we've got this information that we didn't have before. We didn't have the ability to kind of capture it and work with it in quite the same way."

— Robert Gregory, Recruitment Events Coordinator

That data now shapes what happens next. Where are attendees coming from? What programs interest them? Which sessions do they choose? The answers are in Salesforce, informing follow-up campaigns, tailoring future event sessions, and giving the college a fuller picture of which touchpoints in the recruitment journey actually move students toward enrollment.

Quinten's goal is to push that even further, making data actionable in real time, mid-event, so that staffing decisions and session adjustments can happen in the moment rather than in a debrief days later.

"It is a dynamic, easily customizable platform that works seamlessly with Salesforce. And it activates data. There are no gaps in it – any gaps are just things we haven't used yet."

— Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

Part Six

Growing Together

Santa Fe is at a turning point in its Blackthorn journey, moving from a proven foundation to expanded capability across the institution, with clear goals tied directly to enrollment outcomes.

The team has set a target of increasing turnout at key recruitment events, Open House, New Student Preview Days, and campus tours by 10 to 15% annually. With staff efficiency already improved by at least 50% and check-in effectiveness tripled, the next step is to use those gains to deliver more per student per visit: more sessions, more personalized engagement, and a deeper connection between the event experience and enrollment decisions.

Blackthorn Messaging is next on the roadmap. Currently, Santa Fe uses a separate text messaging tool for campaign sends, a disconnected, one-off approach that creates gaps in their communication flow. Integrating Blackthorn Messaging will close that loop, tying event registration, email, and text outreach into a single native Salesforce workflow for the first time.

Navigator is also on the horizon for Open House. With Blackthorn's upcoming interactive campus map feature, placing session locations, dining, and points of interest directly in the attendee app, the potential for guiding 1,500 visitors through a large campus event is significant. Session-level check-in is another priority: tracking where 650 prospective students spend their time, which programs draw the most interest, and which sessions need more capacity, so that every future event is built on what the data actually says.

"Blackthorn has already helped us improve the experiences our visitors have, and we've seen that in our post-event surveys and anecdotal feedback. We're going to look closely at how those efficiencies allow us to do more per student per event – and to see how that contributes to prospective students and their families feeling welcome, and to demonstrate that through enrollment."

– Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

Part Seven

Realizing ROI

At Santa Fe College, ROI from Blackthorn Events shows up in the places that matter most, in conversion rates, in staff capacity, in campus partnerships, and in the quality of data driving every enrollment decision.

More than 85% of Open House attendees apply. More than 94% of campus tour attendees apply. Staff efficiency has improved by at least 50%. Check-in runs three times faster with a third of the headcount. Building and managing a recurring event now takes a third as long as it used to. A food partner that once took a loss at Open House now turns a profit. A template built on day one still runs campus tours without a single modification two years later.

Leadership receives live event reports during the event itself, whereas before, there was no data at all.



And Blackthorn didn't just optimize what already existed. It gave the team the infrastructure to understand what's actually working, communicate that to leadership in real time, and build toward something better every year.

"Blackthorn really listens to customers. I think that's been true from the beginning. And I think as the exposure of Blackthorn grows, that's only gotten better over time. And that's rare – most companies become less customer-friendly over time. Blackthorn has gone the reverse."

– Quinten Eyman, Director of Student Recruitment

For Santa Fe College, Blackthorn didn't just replace a broken event stack; it gave a resource-strapped team the tools to run enterprise-level events, generate enrollment-driving data, and build the kind of campus experiences that turn prospective students into enrolled ones.
