

OPPORTUNITY COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



SANTA FE COLLEGE





Santa Fe College

An Institution That Keeps Asking Who It Has Not Yet Reached

At most community colleges, shared governance means a Faculty Senate and perhaps a student representative to the Board of Trustees. At Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida, it means something more: a governance model in which maintenance workers, grounds crews and administrative staff hold equal standing alongside faculty and students in shaping institutional decisions. Every employee has a voice because, as President Dr. Paul Broadie II sees it, every employee contributes to student success — including the maintenance worker who stops to walk a lost student to class.

That philosophy — what Dr. Broadie calls a “culture of care” — is the first pillar of the college’s strategic plan. But what distinguishes Santa Fe is not the philosophy itself. It is the institution’s willingness to keep expanding the circle of who that care is for: first, traditional students; then unemployed parents; then middle schoolers who don’t see themselves as college material; then formerly incarcerated individuals reentering society; then residents of rural communities so remote the college bought a mobile classroom to reach them. At every stage, Santa Fe has asked the same question: Who haven’t we found yet?

The Carnegie Classifications — the nation’s gold standard for over 50 years — now determines institutional excellence based not on prestige or student selectivity but on how well schools set their students up for success. The new Student Access and Earnings Classification framework evaluates institutions on these two critical metrics, with unique geographic contextualization. With more than 470 institutions nationwide designated as Opportunity Colleges and Universities (OCUs) for providing high access and competitive earnings, it’s time to measure what matters most — student outcomes.

The OCU designation was designed to help ensure that higher education becomes an even more vital engine of economic mobility — particularly for students furthest from opportunity. Colleges and universities are reviewed every three years, and there is no limit to how many colleges can become OCUs.

Before They Arrive

Santa Fe's most ambitious bet is that the college's work should start years before a student ever applies. Through SF Achieve, the college has signed a memorandum of understanding with the local school district and embedded its own advisors directly in the schools, starting as early as middle school. Students who become SF Achieve Scholars receive sustained guidance on what it takes to be a college student — not necessarily at Santa Fe, but anywhere. The college introduces Scholars to careers in the trades as well as transfer pathways, walks them through financial aid and scholarship applications, and works to shift the self-perception of students who do not see themselves as college material.



For Scholars who do choose Santa Fe, the financial barriers fall away. Every SF Achieve student receives a \$400 textbook voucher. If financial aid leaves a remaining gap, the college covers it. The results have been striking: After the program launched, in-district enrollment doubled, and it tripled in the college's most rural communities. The strategy did not require a sophisticated marketing campaign. It required visibility — the college showing up and helping families see that college is possible.

Three years ago, Santa Fe extended the pipeline even further by opening the Academy of Science and Technology, a charter school on the college's campus built on a P-TECH model — a national framework in which students earn both a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential through integrated partnerships with employers. Like the college itself, the Academy is open access. In its first year, it earned an A rating from the state, with PSAT scores above the national average. By age 18, Academy graduates have earned a high school diploma, an associate's degree, at least two industry-recognized credentials and meaningful work-based learning experience through internships with UF Health — the University of Florida's health network. They can enter the workforce or transfer to a university, equipped for either.



Paul Broadie II, President Santa Fe College

“**Santa Fe’s most ambitious bet is that the college’s work should start years before a student ever applies.**”

Second Chances

Perhaps the clearest expression of Santa Fe’s expanding reach is Freedom to Learn, launched approximately two years ago to serve formerly incarcerated individuals. The program addresses a population that faces not only economic barriers to reentry but the psychological weight of stigma — the sense of not belonging on a college campus, the risk of reoffending when no other path feels possible. The data behind the program is compelling: Recidivism rates drop with each level of educational attainment, declining modestly with a GED, substantially with an associate’s degree, and effectively to zero with a master’s degree. Santa Fe constructed an infrastructure of peer networks, dedicated advising and a community advisory group. Students can voluntarily identify as formerly incarcerated, which connects them with others who share their experience and ensures that advisors can offer targeted support.

These outcomes illustrate what is possible when an institution is willing to reach people others have written off. One student wanted to become a radiographic technologist, but his record made licensure impossible: A faculty member accompanied him to get his record expunged, and he now works in the field and mentors current students. Another student could not find work enrolled through the program, earned her associate’s degree and is now completing her bachelor’s degree. A third student was awarded the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship and transferred to the University of Florida (UF).

The Handoff

Santa Fe transfers more students to the University of Florida than any other institution in the state — and the relationship extends well beyond standard 2+2 articulation. Seventy percent of Santa Fe applicants are admitted to UF, a figure



that rises to nearly 89 percent for honors students. Thirty-seven degree programs offer direct admission pathways. The campus houses a “Gator Den” for students planning to transfer, and UF itself routes students not initially admitted in fields like design, construction and engineering to Santa Fe with a clear path back. Faculty at both institutions coordinate curriculum to ensure that students are fully prepared when they arrive.

Florida’s statewide course-numbering system provides the infrastructure, but the relationship between the two institutions makes it work. The model also creates a built-in credential safety net: Students who begin on a transfer track but decide not to continue to the university do not leave with a scattering of credits. They leave with an associate’s degree and, in many cases, work experience — a meaningful credential with labor market value on its own.

Rethinking the Container

To do this work, Santa Fe’s first insight was that the structure of higher education itself — the 16-week semester, the two-year degree, the daytime schedule — was a barrier for many of the people it most wanted to serve. When the college set



out to reach unemployed and underemployed residents of Alachua County, they considered that a two-year associate's degree would be excellent preparation for a career. But for someone without a job and with children to support, two years is an impossibility. So the college's faculty compressed some programs into seven-week formats.

This intensive program is called ACB Excel — Achieve, Conquer, Believe, Excel. It is tuition-free for students and funded by philanthropic dollars raised largely from the businesses and industries that hire the graduates upon completion. The college recruits participants not through the local workforce board but through churches, community meetings and word of mouth — because the people who most need the opportunity are often the ones who may not know to walk into a government office. Across four cohorts, completers of the programs offered have achieved 100% job placement.

Educating the Whole Family

ACB Excel requires participants to have a child in the local school district — a deliberate design choice rooted in Santa Fe's conviction that breaking cycles of generational poverty means reaching the whole household, not just the student. Each evening begins with a family dinner: Parents and children sit together, often with a guest speaker discussing careers, before students head to class. Their children stay on campus for reading and STEM activities led by local United Way volunteers, with a particular focus on literacy by third grade. Over seven compressed weeks, faculty-student relationships deepen into something closer to mentorship than instruction. Faculty help with job placement. They get to know students' children by name. When a graduate sends an email that says I got the job, the connection is personal. Students leave not only with a credential but with immediate social capital — a faculty member who is now a colleague, a reference, a neighbor.

That family-centered approach reflects a broader institutional commitment to removing barriers that have nothing to do with academics but everything to do with student success. Forty-six percent of Santa Fe's students are food insecure. The college has placed food pantries at every campus location, including one inside the campus police department that is open around the clock. The operating assumption is simple: A student who is hungry, or whose child is struggling, cannot focus on coursework. Address the barrier, and the learning follows.



A Culture, Not a Strategy

Many of Santa Fe's faculty are themselves graduates of the institution. They teach in a place that changed their own trajectory, and they carry a personal investment in its mission that no strategic plan can manufacture. When those faculty were asked to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan for accreditation — a process that at many institutions produces little more than a compliance document — they chose to center it on belonging. The plan is data-driven, outcomes-focused and tied to professional development through the college's Center for Teaching and Learning. It is a characteristic move for an institution that has consistently turned obligations into opportunities.

"If you want to be an Opportunity College, you can't be a one-dimensional institution," Dr. Broadie says. Santa Fe has taken that principle literally. The model works not because of any single program but because of a culture — built by people who have lived it — that keeps asking who it has not yet reached.

CULTURE



Paul Broadie II, President Santa Fe College



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you can't be one
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LEARN MORE



Santa Fe College

Santa Fe College, a comprehensive public institution of higher education serving North Central Florida and beyond, adds value to the lives of our students and enriches our community through excellence in teaching and learning, innovative educational programs and student services, and community leadership and service. Through strong community bonds and a commitment to inquiry, innovation, and lifelong learning, Santa Fe College creates an environment in which all people thrive.

Learn more at: <https://www.sfcollege.edu>.



Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education

The Carnegie Classification® is the leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed the classification in 1973 to support its program of research and policy analysis. In 2022, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education partnered to re-envision the future of the Carnegie Classifications and better reflect the public purpose, mission, focus, and impact of higher education. The 2025 Carnegie Classifications were the first release through this partnership. The Carnegie Classifications will be updated next in 2028.

For more information: <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu>.



Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

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