

How JSU's graduate admissions team scales personal outreach with Text

Overview

Jacksonville State University (JSU), a regional public university in Alabama, passed 10,000 students for the first time in fall 2025. Madison Willingham, Coordinator of Graduate Recruitment Communication, and the rest of the five-person graduate admissions team, including Associate Director Roxanne Stancil, make texting feel personal for busy adult learners.

INSTITUTION	Public regional university
LOCATION	Alabama
STUDENTS	10,000+
DEPARTMENT	Graduate admissions
CHANNEL	Text
CRM	Ellucian Recruit

The challenge

JSU faced declining enrollment and low response to traditional channels. Emails were easy to overlook, and phone calls didn't always align with students' schedules. The team needed a modern, scalable way to reach students quickly.

- Emails easy to overlook
- Calls that didn't always align with busy schedules
- A small team with growing volume

Why Mongoose

Graduate admissions built a texting-first strategy that handles high-volume outreach and one-to-one conversations. Campaigns, personalization fields, scheduled messages, and auto-responses send timely nudges, welcomes, and event follow-ups that still sound human.

~11% average response rate across active graduate campaigns.



“Texting has been one of the most effective ways for us to reach busy adults.”

MADISON WILLINGHAM · COORDINATOR OF GRADUATE RECRUITMENT COMMUNICATION

Campaigns that get replies

The team uses campaign performance data to learn what resonates with graduate and doctoral audiences. Results vary by message and moment, which is what makes them useful benchmarks. Since April 2025, the team has revamped or created 22 communication plans.

~11%

average response across active graduate campaigns

21%

response to the initial general inquiry text

10%

response during a free application week campaign

5%

response to program fair outreach

01

A first-day check-in

In spring 2026, the team texted new graduate students on the first day of classes. “The responses were very helpful and allowed me to identify areas where we can add more information and support,” Madison said.

02

Time back for a small team

“Mongoose saves us significant time and effort by allowing us to build texting campaigns that answer common questions before students even need to ask,” Madison said. Auto-replies keep up when free application weeks spike volume.

03

Personal, never robotic

Messages are signed by recruiters and use first names and programs. “It’s nice when we’re able to say, ‘hey, Madison,’ instead of, ‘hey, future student,’” she said.

04

Visibility across three inboxes

The dashboard shows how students feel, trending topics spark new plans, and conversation resolution keeps follow-ups organized. “It’s so beneficial to have everything in one spot,” Madison said.

WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

- **Personalization at scale.** Recruiter-signed messages that feel human.
- **Scheduled messages and auto-responses.** Timely outreach and lighter inbox load at peak times.
- **Campaign analytics.** Data that supports continuous improvement.
- **Ellucian Recruit connector.** Texts sent from segments or triggered from the CRM.

Friendly by design

JSU leans into its brand, the Friendliest Campus in the South, so texts stay warm and invite a reply.

“I really feel that by leaning into our brand, the Friendliest Campus in the South, Mongoose texts never feel robotic. The messages stay warm, personal, and inviting, which encourages students to reply and start a conversation.”

MADISON WILLINGHAM · JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

01

“Come say hi”

As an undergraduate recruiter, Madison scheduled a simple text while working a college fair, and students showed up just to say hello. “The number of students that came up to me was surprising,” she said.

02

Event check-in texts

At graduate events, attendees who check in get a welcome text signed by the recruiter staffing the event, which connects a name to a face and starts better conversations onsite.

“Wrapping it all up with the personalization and hitting those touchpoints that they really care about, that matters. And we really couldn’t do it without Mongoose.”

MADISON WILLINGHAM



LOOKING AHEAD

JSU saw an increase in spring 2026 first-time graduate and doctoral enrollment compared to the previous cycle. Next, Madison is building communication plans for every stage of the graduate funnel, nearly all with Text as a key touchpoint.

“Mongoose has become an essential part of how we communicate with students. We genuinely couldn’t do this work as effectively without it.”

Madison Willingham

Want to see what Text could do for your graduate admissions team?

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