



How Florida National University
revolutionized their
accreditation prep



At a glance

FLORIDA NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTION SNAPSHOT

Florida National University | Florida



Institution type:
Private, for-profit
university



Total enrolled students:
4,000



Total full-time faculty:
100+



Number of campuses:
3

The obstacle

- Information was scattered across campus, laborious data-collection process
- Outdated digital platform hindered efficient assessment and progress tracking
- Time crunch, only 18 months until FNU's SACSCOC reaffirmation

The solution

- [Watermark Planning & Self-Study](#)
- [Watermark Course Evaluations & Surveys](#)
- [Watermark Faculty Success](#)

The outcome

- Improved assessment completion time, collaboration, and budget tracking
- Enhanced insight into programmatic accreditation self-studies
- Survey response rates increased from 1-3% to an average of 80%
- Streamlined reporting, teaching schedules, and faculty reviews, replacing cumbersome manual processes
- Florida National University secured their 2022 SACSCOC reaffirmation

“

“These changes have been a huge win. Getting proper benchmarks, assessment data, and course evaluation results has given us clarity as to what's actually happening within divisions and programs. We're swimming in good data now.”

Dr. Anthony Berrios, Ph.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs
Florida National University



CASE STUDY: FLORIDA NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

For over 40 years, Florida National University (FNU) has grown to meet the needs of the community in metropolitan Miami. Starting as a small local college, the university has expanded to offer a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs in Accounting, Nursing, Information Technology, Business Administration, and more. Yet, as the university grows, so does the complexity of its accreditation preparations.

The challenge

We met the FNU accreditation team just 18 months before their SACSCOC reaffirmation. Made up of two dedicated administrators, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Anthony Berrios, Ph.D., and the Director of Accreditation & Compliance, Dr. Kelly Krenkel, DPT, Ed.D., this small team was facing a number of obstacles.

The first challenge was locating and collecting the needed data from faculty. Each of them had their own system of saving and organizing their files, resulting in critical information being stored in various offices across campus. If a faculty or staff member was unavailable, so was their data.

Once the necessary data was acquired, the team had another hurdle to overcome, inputting that data into an outdated digital platform. Painting an accurate picture of the school's programming, assessment reporting, faculty performance, and course evaluations was incredibly tedious in this system. The platform was not user-friendly, the team couldn't assign tasks to other people, and there was no way to track progress toward important milestones.

The combination of scattered data, an outdated digital platform, and limited manpower created a rocky road to reaffirmation. Suddenly, 18 months felt like a blink of an eye. *How could the team fix these issues and secure their SACSCOC reaffirmation in such a short period of time?* These stressors were playing in the back of the minds of Dr. Berrios and Dr. Krenkel, and finally, they decided enough was enough. It was time for a new approach.



Securing buy-in and kicking off implementation

Dr. Berrios and Dr. Krenkel wanted a service provider that offered multiple adaptable solutions that could grow with their team. They knew that if they chose Watermark, they could easily onboard new solutions over time because all of the tools worked within one ecosystem. Dr. Berrios said, “We liked the idea that there were additional modules, additional platforms. So if we were able to make Planning & Self-Study, Course Evaluations & Surveys, and Faculty Success work, we would be able to continue to add additional components. If we could get started with this relationship, if we can make this work under a time crunch, then over time, we would gradually build up to using the rest of the platforms.”



Once the executive-level administrators understood the need for new tech, securing buy-in for the trio of accreditation tools was simple. The administration agreed that it was important to purchase whatever tools were necessary to successfully meet the reaffirmation deadline, and Watermark’s accreditation readiness tools were the perfect solution. Looking back Dr. Berrios said, “We could have gotten one platform at a time, but we were able to get approval to jump into as many programs as we felt we could manage. It was a pretty solid strategy for us, but a little bit overwhelming.”

“We liked how Watermark’s Customer Success Managers and product experts helped us along the way. We were working directly with the people who know the platform the best.”

— Dr. Kelly Krenkel, DPT, Ed.D.

Director of Accreditation & Compliance, Florida National University

Taking the plunge felt scary at first, but the Watermark implementation team worked closely with Dr. Berrios and Dr. Krenkel to make onboarding as smooth as possible. Dr. Krenkel reflected on this time saying, “We liked how Watermark’s Customer Success Managers and product experts helped us along the way. We were working directly with the people who know the platform the best. Our implementation process was more like jumping off a high dive because we did so much so fast. But in retrospect, we realized that it was really for the better because the majority of the platforms work together. So as you’re trying to build each one of them out, being able to say, ‘Hey, I know this does this! And now we’re seeing that this does this, and they work together!’ helped us adjust along the way. Our implementation process was smooth, we were very efficient.”

Dr. Berrios and Dr. Krenkel both agree that purchasing the accreditation readiness tools at the same time helped them establish good habits early and build a cohesive process from the ground up.

The results

The combination of tools helped Dr. Berrios and Dr. Krenkel solve each of their pain points and secure Florida National University's 2022 SACSCOC reaffirmation. Though the reaffirmation was the catalyst for the purchase, now Planning & Self-Study, Course Evaluations & Surveys, and Faculty Success are an essential part of the department's workflows.

The team uses Planning & Self-Study to track and organize all programmatic accreditation self-studies. These are essential building blocks for securing accreditation and reaffirmation. This tool has significantly improved their ability to track the self-study progress and provide support to each program, adding a level of insight that their previous digital solution lacked.

"Planning & Self-Study has significantly improved assessment completion time, collaboration, budget tracking, and review of our action plans," says Dr. Krenkel. "The ability to pull data directly from other modules provides an easy way to support outcome review."

One of the biggest areas of growth was in their course evaluation processes. Before using Course Evaluations & Surveys, FNU's survey response rate averaged between 1% and 3%. Their response rates have seen an exponential improvement, now averaging around 80%. "Before, it would take months for survey response data to get filtered and distributed," Dr. Berrios said, "So by the time that data actually came out, it wasn't even actionable anymore. Now we're seeing the course evaluation survey results three days after the course, and have time to understand the feedback before the next class starts."

"Before, it would take months for survey response data to get filtered and distributed," Dr. Berrios said, "So by the time that data actually came out, it wasn't even actionable anymore. Now we're seeing the course evaluation survey results three days after the course, and have time to understand the feedback before the next class starts."

**Dr. Anthony Berrios, Ph.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs
Florida National University**

Dr. Krenkel agreed saying, "We have the ability to gather more data now. Before, we only had one person that was taking data out of Survey Monkey, putting it into Excel, and then doing all the sorting manually. We had to keep the number of questions small to keep it manageable. Now we're able to ask a wider breadth of questions that are more focused and can get the data we need to actually drive improvement."



Before using Course Evaluations & Surveys, FNU could only conduct one survey per year. Surveys are an essential part of the administration's decision-making, and when surveys were conducted infrequently and response rates were so low, it felt like there wasn't a foundation of reliable data that they could base their decisions on. Now, surveys are conducted twice a semester, and faculty can see their data automatically on their dashboard three days after the course closes. Administration can make quality, data-driven decisions, and compare results from semester to semester.

Florida National University
improved their student response rates

**from 1-3% to an
average of 80%**

using Course Evaluations & Surveys.

The team uses Faculty Success to build reports such as the SACS Faculty Roster and the CCNE Standard II faculty table. They've also found the scheduled teaching function to be very helpful, along with the workflow process for faculty reviews and professional development. Prior to utilizing this tool, the team had to maintain faculty files in physical folders and various digital spreadsheets. It was bulky and time-consuming. Now, faculty are able to maintain their own portfolios through one unified system.

"These changes have been a huge win," says Dr. Berrios. "Getting proper benchmarks, assessment data, and course evaluation results has given us clarity as to what's actually happening within divisions and programs. We're swimming in good data now."



Just getting started

Dr. Berrios is proud of the culture shift he's seen on campus and is eager to continue using the accreditation readiness solutions more effectively and efficiently. "We're more of a data-driven organization than we've ever been," he says, "and I think that was a big positive culture change. The breadth of the adoption has been great to see."

Dr. Krenkel agrees that considerable progress has been made, but she is excited to keep that momentum going. Through implementing the accreditation readiness solutions, she feels that they have a strong 360 view of the institution. The next step is to connect those insights to Student Success & Engagement and Student Learning & Licensure, "I know it will be eye-opening for us."



Watermark gives higher education institutions the tools they need to easily track, manage, and examine their data. For over twenty years, colleges and universities have used Watermark solutions to complete assessment and accreditation requirements, capture and analyze student feedback, showcase faculty accomplishments, and improve student engagement. Watermark's Educational Impact Suite (EIS) puts data into context so faculty and staff can focus on what matters most: institutional and student success. Learn why Watermark is trusted by over 1,700 colleges and universities to support continuous improvement at www.watermarkinsights.com.