Safeguarding Advanced Research, Sustaining Opportunity

FIU's CMMC Journey with Redspin

Florida International University (FIU), one of the largest public research universities in the United States, operates at the intersection of education, innovation, and federal collaboration. As an R1 institution supporting Department of Defense (DoD) contracts and high-value research grants, FIU plays an active role in the federal research ecosystem.

For FIU, preparing for Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) was not simply about maintaining eligibility for contracts. It was about protecting research continuity, sustaining grant funding, and safeguarding sensitive government-sponsored innovation.

Already a long-time Clearwater client supporting HIPAA initiatives, FIU turned to Redspin when CMMC requirements began taking shape. Redspin's leadership within the CMMC ecosystem combined with its experience navigating complex, regulated organizations made the partnership a natural extension of FIU's existing compliance strategy.

In this conversation, Helvetiella Longoria, Chief Information Security Officer at FIU, shares why the university chose Redspin and how the partnership is helping FIU prepare for sustainable CMMC readiness.

"It's a true partnership. It's more than just a contractual arrangement. It's about aligning values, collaborating toward common goals, and building a foundation of trust"

-Helvetiella Longoria
CISO, FIU

Understanding the Stakes

When did FIU first begin preparing for CMMC, and why was it important?
When the Department of Defense introduced CMMC v1.0, FIU had just completed implementing NIST SP 800-171 controls.

The announcement immediately raised strategic questions. How would CMMC differ? What level would apply to FIU's research programs? How would version changes impact planning?

As a research university working across government contracts, subcontractor relationships, and competitive grants, FIU understood that CMMC was not simply a compliance exercise. It directly affected the university's ability to qualify for sensitive federal research opportunities.

> **"It's not just about awarded business," Longoria explained. "There is an ecosystem FIU works within, as a contractor, a subcontractor, and through grants, to move and protect high-value government research."**

Maintaining eligibility meant preparing early and preparing correctly.

Without a clear CMMC strategy, FIU risked more than delayed compliance. Misalignment could have jeopardized eligibility for sensitive federal research programs, disrupted grant continuity, and introduced uncertainty into long-term research planning.

Choosing the Right Partner

Why did FIU choose Redspin to support its CMMC journey?
FIU's relationship with Redspin's parent company Clearwater provided a foundation of trust. When it came time to address CMMC, FIU sought out Redspin because of its recognized authority in the CMMC space and its deep understanding of NIST SP 800-171.

Equally important, Redspin understood highly regulated industries and the realities of operating inside a large, decentralized university. FIU selected Redspin because it needed a partner that understood both CMMC's evolving regulatory landscape and the operational realities of higher education, where funding models shift, research initiatives evolve, and compliance must adapt without slowing innovation.

Universities must remain flexible. Research projects shift. Funding cycles evolve. Technical environments are highly specialized. Compliance efforts must adapt without disrupting research agility.

> **"Working with the Redspin team was a very easy transition," Longoria said. "Their expertise shone from the very start. They understood our environment and what we needed to do."**

Florida International University is a Top 50, preeminent public research university with 55,000 students from all 50 states and more than 140 countries, as well as an alumni network of more than 340,000. Located in the global city of Miami, the university offers more than 200 degree programs at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels, including medicine and law. FIU faculty are leaders in their fields and include National Academy members, Fulbright Scholars, and MacArthur Genius Fellows. A Carnegie R1 institution, FIU drives impactful research in environmental resilience, health, and technology and innovation. Home to the Wall of Wind and Institute of Environment, FIU stands at the forefront of discovery and innovation. With a focus on student success, economic mobility and community engagement, FIU is redefining what it means to be a public research university.

Redspin's early authorization as a C3PAO and its central role in the evolving CMMC ecosystem provided FIU with confidence that guidance would remain aligned with regulatory changes.

Navigating Change: From CMMC 1.0 to today

How did evolving CMMC requirements affect FIU's planning?
The transition from CMMC v1.0 to v2.0 introduced new complexity. Certification levels shifted. Requirements evolved. Timelines changed.

For a university coordinating multiple contracts, departments, and research initiatives, that level of change required careful recalibration.

Redspin worked with FIU to evaluate certification level strategy, align existing NIST 800-171 controls with CMMC 2.0, and begin development of a secure CMMC enclave designed to protect Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI).

> **"CMMC is still a moving target," Longoria noted. "Redspin keeps abreast of those changes and communicates them back to us. That gives us peace of mind."**

Through early gap analysis and structured planning, FIU was able to clarify its Level 2 pathway and begin enclave development well ahead of final rulemaking, avoiding reactive decision-making and reducing the risk of costly rework.

Rather than applying a rigid model, Redspin adapted its approach to FIU's structure, meeting the university where it was and aligning CMMC requirements with its research operating model.

Partnership in a Shifting Landscape
CMMC readiness in higher education requires more than control implementation. It requires adaptability, strategic insight, and a partner capable of evolving alongside the institution.

For FIU, the partnership with Redspin reflects a shared commitment to protecting sensitive federal research while preserving the agility necessary for academic innovation.

As regulatory expectations continue to mature, FIU is positioned to move forward with confidence, supported by a partner embedded at the center of the CMMC ecosystem.

Redspin, the federal division of Clearwater, is one of the first Authorized CMMC 3rd-Party Assessment Organizations (C3PAOs) and is the most experienced team of assessors in the ecosystem. As a trusted partner to the Defense Industrial Base, Redspin helps organizations prepare for, achieve, and sustain CMMC through training, assessments, readiness consulting, managed compliance, and secure cloud services.

From building your program to proving it—and maintaining it—Redspin protects the DIB as a service.

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