Special Agent-in-Charge Culbreth, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen – Good morning and Happy New Year. It is indeed an honor and privilege to serve as the guest speaker for this year’s Black History Month Program at the Norfolk Division of the FBI.

Let me begin by saying a resounding thank you to the special agents, support staff, and law enforcement partners of the FBI. Given the volatility and uncertainty of the current threat environment, it is reassuring to know that American can always depend on the never-ending vigilance of the men and women of the FBI.

To my fellow brothers and sisters in arms who have served this country in uniform on the frontlines of freedom, I say thank you for joining the fight, thank you for your many untold sacrifices, and thank you for continuing to serve our communities in civilian life.

As a son of Sussex County, Virginia and a 1968 graduate of Norfolk State, my wife, Patricia and I are no strangers to the Hampton Roads region. I am delighted to have an opportunity to serve as Interim President at my alma mater and equally as excited to continue the important work of building a lasting partnership with the intelligence community. It takes a village to raise a child and to grow a university.

NSU has a unique history of supporting our nation’s cybersecurity mission by leveraging faculty and student skills to provide real-time innovative cyber solutions and highly skilled personnel. Through our work in cybersecurity education and research, we are proud to support the national security community. Some of our work and accomplishments in this important area include:

- Undergraduate and graduate programs in computer science and cybersecurity that build upon synergies gained through partnerships with the Department of Defense and the pioneering of a master’s degree in Cyber-Psychology, which will be a first of its kind in the region.

- The award of more than 20 cybersecurity grants and contracts totaling more than $41 million since 2005. Current major awards includes: $5 million Center for Excellence in Cyber Security from the Department of Defense and $25 million Consortium for K-20 Cybersecurity Workforce Pipeline from the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration.
• Over 50,000 sq/ft in NSU’s Center for Applied Research & Innovation is reserved for cyber classrooms, business incubation, laboratories, and State-of-the-art facility in cloud computing and big data analytics for cyber research.

At Norfolk State, our doors are always open for dialogue and partnership. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with you to advance our shared goal of protecting our national security.

Reflecting back over my service as an Army intelligence officer, I am reminded of the motto of the Army Intelligence Corps, which is “Always Out Front.” In many ways, the military has always been out front in the fight for civil rights and equality for African Americans. Today, I would like to share with you my personal experiences in the military in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and how that experience influenced my life and the lives of the countless others that came after me.

My life journey began in Jarret, Virginia on the family farm, where we grew peanuts, cotton, soybeans and raised hogs and cattle. We did not have much money, but we did have the love and support of each other. My parents had 10 children and they instilled in each of us early on the values of hard work, integrity, and perseverance. They also instilled in each of us the value of a high quality education because they knew that education is the great equalizer in a nation that was at the time full of great inequality and injustice.

After high school, I went to Norfolk State for undergrad and majored in sociology. In those days, if you went to a land-grant school, the first two years were mandatory ROTC. Every male had to be in ROTC. In my junior year, I received an Army ROTC scholarship, which paid for my tuition, my books, and gave me $100 per month. The scholarship was an extremely important victory not only for me, but also for my family because it helped to provide financial independence and underscored that success was possible for poor black families even in challenging times.

In ROTC, I learned what it meant to be a leader. As a battalion commander, I was responsible for the well-being of 300 or 400 young men, an experience that taught me a great deal. First, it taught me the importance of taking care of your people. Secondly, it taught me how to influence and inspire others to achieve desired outcomes. For example, every Wednesday, you had to wear your uniform. If someone was not properly dressed, you had to talk to them about it – let them know that this is the expectation and your responsibility. Lastly, I learned esprit-de-corps - what it means to be part of something larger than yourself.

Although, I was fortunate not to have been personally targeted by overt racism during my childhood or as a college student, the vestiges of Jim Crow were still very much in place. The Norfolk YMCA was still segregated, and Blacks were not allowed to go inside to swim.

I can remember vividly picketing in front of the Norfolk YMCA, so that my fraternity brothers and I could sign up to join. My wife, Patricia, led and coordinated student busing from Hampton Roads to the March on Washington. We and so many African Americans of our era joined the fight for Civil Rights not because it was easy or popular, but because we believed that all humankind should be afforded basic dignity and respect, and that every individual that was willing to put in hard honest work deserved a fair shot at the American Dream.
After graduating from Norfolk State in 1968, I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and headed off to Fort Knox, Kansas to begin my four-year military commitment as an Armor Officer. My dreams of riding into battle on a tank were short lived however. The Army realized that they did not have any officers of color in the military intelligence command. Because I was an Army ROTC scholarship winner, I soon found myself with new orders in hand to report to Fort Holabird, Md., for the military intelligence school.

For me, the most challenging part of being an Army intelligence officer in 1968 was not having to fight racial discrimination, bigotry, or injustice but rather learning how to speak fluent-Vietnamese at the Defense Language Institute at El Paso, Texas. Shortly after successfully completing Vietnamese language training at the Defense Language Institute, I shipped out to Vietnam to join the fight.

As my four-year commitment ended, Patricia and I decided that I would either make the military my career or go back to graduate school. She had gotten her masters at Carnegie Mellon and was teaching at Norfolk State. She had started applying for me to graduate school and saw a picture of one of my best undergraduate friends in a brochure from Syracuse University. She contacted him and he told her I should apply. “We” applied and shortly received a letter of admittance. It was a very short window though.

This was the early '70s, and we did not have cell phones. Because Syracuse had a history with military programs, they knew how to get a teletype to my command, to say: Captain Stith has a full scholarship to Syracuse University, but it is a short turnaround. If he can take this, we need him here in three weeks. The command called me: Capt. Stith, you got this full scholarship to Syracuse University. If you want to take it, we will help you. I said, yeah, I want it. They sent a helicopter to pick me up. I paid part of my way back from Vietnam because I had to get back so fast. In three weeks, I was sitting in a class at Syracuse University’s Whitman School of Management to begin work that would ultimately lead to MBA, Ph.D. and a 36-year career in higher education leadership and seats on the boards of directors of America’s most successful corporations.

One organization that I am particularly proud of is the PhD Project, which I co-founded in 1994 with the goal of diversifying the corporate boardroom by diversifying the role models in front of the classroom. Today, the PhD Project’s expansive network of supporters, sponsors and universities helps African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans attain their business PhD and become the business professors who will mentor the next generation of leaders.

Having more than quadrupled the number of minority business professors in the U.S., the PhD project has made tremendous strides toward achieving that goal. The past two decades have been an evolution and a journey for the organization and those that have benefitted from its efforts. Consider the following statistics

- The number of minority business PhDs in the U.S. has quadrupled, from 294 in 1994 to over 1,300 today.
• Over 300 minority doctoral students are currently receiving mentorship from the program.
• More than 1,000 minority business professors have earned their doctoral degrees with the program’s support.
• An immeasurable number of students have benefited from the knowledge, mentoring and guidance of minority professors.

My story of success is not unique, the military of the late 1960s and 1970s and the military of today has always been out front and serves as a gateway to opportunity and success for all who are loyal to this country, committed to freedom, and fit to fight.

Whether as an Army captain in Vietnam, university faculty member, or corporate board director, and now University President, I have never forgotten where my journey began or the lessons of leadership that I learned on the family farm in Jarrett, Virginia and as an ROTC cadet at Norfolk State. There has never been any doubt in my mind about whether I would be successful on the road of life because I knew that my family, the NSU community, and my brothers and sisters in arms were all standing firmly behind me.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to be here today and for serving our communities and always being out front. Now more than ever, our country needs your leadership. I am happy to answer a few questions.