Peter McPherson is president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Since becoming president of APLU in January 2006, McPherson has grown and strengthened the association’s membership – helping cultivate a vibrant and collaborative public higher education community. He has overseen the expansion of a sophisticated federal advocacy arm, and more than doubled the size of the association’s staff to work in partnership with member institutions on innovative projects aimed at helping them better serve students, communities, their states, the nation, and the world.

Under McPherson’s leadership, APLU expanded and strengthened its council and commission structure to enable public university leaders to share successful practices and collaborate on innovative solutions to shared challenges and opportunities. He helped APLU evolve, in part, into a “think-and-action-tank”, building out an extensive portfolio of work with its members aimed at: driving equitable student success; fostering research and innovation to meet societal needs; and deepening community and economic engagement to benefit all. The association has grown to 244 members, with institutions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories. In 2014, McPherson led the expansion of APLU’s membership to include all of North America. Today, nine Canadian and five Mexican public research universities are members of APLU.

**Key Accomplishments at APLU**

Some of the key highlights of McPherson’s tenure at APLU include:

- Fostered a robust public university community of presidents/chancellors, provosts, vice presidents/chancellors, deans, and others who work collaboratively through the association’s network of councils, commissions, boards, and projects to share ideas and effective practices and identify ways to better serve their university communities, the general public and other stakeholders.

- Vastly expanded the scope and effectiveness of the association’s advocacy work. Over the past decade and a half, APLU has established itself as a key player in Washington, working closely with its members and partner organizations advocate for an array of key higher education and research policy issues, including strong investment in student financial aid programs, higher education accountability and transparency, robust funding for basic research, and an immigration system that welcomes the contributions of talent throughout the world.

- Initiated an array of grant-funded work to, in partnership with its members, equitably advance the education, research, and engagement missions of public and land-grant universities. In turn, the association now operates as a “think-and-action tank” with a diverse portfolio of work, an important part of which is in student success focused on studying, innovating, testing, and scaling ways to more equitably serve students – particularly those who are underrepresented – to increase graduation levels and successfully prepare them for the workforce.
• Helped lead the higher education community to expand its priorities, especially for federal programs, from access, to access and completion, and increasingly to include workforce preparedness as well.

• In tandem with the leadership of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), created a permanent partnership between APLU and USU to incubate and promulgate the reforms necessary to help public urban research universities best serve their rapidly changing student populations. USU works with these institutions to pilot, refine, and share the most effective practices to accelerate innovation. Its work includes preparing the 21st Century workforce, advancing racial justice and equity, fostering student achievement, and improving the health of a diverse population.

• Spearheaded the creation of APLU’s Powered by Publics initiative that launched in 2018 that is convening 125 public universities and university systems within 16 “transformation clusters” – reaching 3 million undergraduate students, including 1 million Pell grant recipients. The effort aims to help schools eliminate the equity gap and award hundreds of thousands more degrees, with a focus specifically on underrepresented students. APLU aims to broadly share lessons from the collaboration to help spur student-centered transformation across the sector.

• Launched the NSF INCLUDES Aspire Alliance – one of the first five such national alliances funded. The Aspire Alliance is a collaboration APLU co-leads with the University of Wisconsin-Madison engaging more than 100 universities, colleges and groups to diversify STEM faculty and develop inclusive cultures and practices. The ultimate goal is to attract more underrepresented students – women, members of minority racial and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds – into STEM college programs, assist them to stay in these programs, and help them graduate and succeed in a modern STEM workforce. APLU’s work as part of INCLUDES is an outgrowth of the association’s 15 years of developing its STEM education portfolio begun under McPherson.

• Championed a range of university transparency and accountability efforts, in part, through the creation of an office within APLU that is dedicated to data and policy analysis. Under McPherson's leadership, APLU has played the leading role among higher education associations on the development and advancement of the bipartisan, bicameral College Transparency Act. When enacted, the legislation will provide much more complete data on student outcomes.

• In 2007, McPherson led APLU’s role in co-founding the Voluntary System of Accountability, which was designed to enable institutions to demonstrate their voluntary commitment to publishing access, cost, and student outcomes measures for the benefit of the public, prospective students, and lawmakers. The VSA has since evolved into a data analytics tool for universities to improve their strategic planning and decision-making. Building on those efforts, APLU co-founded the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) in 2014 to provide a more complete understanding of student success at universities. SAM was created to address flawed federal education data that only counts first-time, full-time students who receive federal financial aid.

• Recognizing that digital transformation is critical for universities to maximize student success, McPherson oversaw the establishment of the Personalized Learning Consortium at APLU. He
also created the APLU Office of Digital Transformation for Student Success, which is dedicated to helping universities maximize the potential of digital tools and data in combination with enhanced teaching, learning and assessment practices.

- Played a key role in establishing the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), an organization for the reciprocal recognition and oversight by states of out-of-state distance education programs. Nearly every state is now participating.

- Aggressively worked to advance the internationalization of member campuses, including through study abroad and domestically focused programs. Championed federal efforts to grow the number of international students studying at U.S. public research universities.

- Recognizing the shared challenges and opportunities facing public research universities across North America in a “Zone of Knowledge”, McPherson expanded APLU membership to include a select group of public research universities in Canada and Mexico.

- Supported APLU’s strong leadership of agriculture and natural resource programs with an array of projects, including through the creation of the Task Force on Antibiotic Resistance in Production Agriculture that the association created with the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges. The task force’s work led to the creation of a new national Institute for Antimicrobial Resistance Research and Education.

- In 2013, launched APLU’s Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Designation and Awards program to recognize universities that are leaders in spurring and promoting regional economic development. Participating institutions complete a rigorous self-study process and earn the IEP designation if enough benchmarks are met. To date, 71 universities have earned the designation with an additional 37 institutions currently pursuing it. The program is available to all universities regardless of APLU membership.

Before leading APLU, McPherson served as president of Michigan State University (MSU) from 1993 to 2004. His accomplishments at MSU included a “Tuition Guarantee,” which held tuition increases to inflation for all but two years of his leadership. He also led a campaign to vastly increase the number of students participating in study abroad, tripling the number of students participating in the program and cementing Michigan State’s distinction of having one of the largest and most active programs in the country. Other initiatives under his leadership included the expansion of the honors college, deepening the university’s ties to K-12 schools, and redoubling the institution’s fundraising efforts while bolstering its endowment returns. Michigan State’s research funding and national standing increased under McPherson’s leadership. He also began MSU’s years-long effort to successfully win a U.S. Department of Energy competition to host the FRIB – Facility for Rare Isotope Beams – cementing the university’s role as a global leader in nuclear physics.

In 2003, McPherson took a leave from the presidency of Michigan State, to serve as Director of Economic Policy in Iraq with the Coalition Provisional Authority. There, he worked closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Iraq to open up the country’s banks, to develop key economic policies, and create a new currency for the country.
Prior to being named president of Michigan State University, McPherson was a Group Executive Vice President at Bank of America. He led the bank’s renegotiation of $8 billion in troubled debt with developing countries and managed the bank’s work in Latin America and Canada. He later oversaw the bank’s trust department and domestic and international private banking operations.

During the Reagan administration, McPherson served as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Treasury from 1987 to 1989. As the number two official at Treasury, his work included work on trade, tax, and international issues. He served as one of three U.S. negotiators for the Canadian Free Trade Agreement in the final weeks of those negotiations. That agreement was a forerunner of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Between Treasury Secretaries Baker and Brady, he served as Acting Secretary of the cabinet department.

Before his work at the Treasury Department, McPherson served as Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from 1981 to 1987. While serving in that role, he oversaw missions in 70 countries and was tasked with the U.S. response to famine in Africa, leading the delivery of more than two million tons of food to Africa over a 12-month period. As USAID administrator, he also led worldwide efforts with the United Nations Children’s Fund to address diarrhea and dehydration, then the leading causes of death for children in the developing world. The global campaign saved millions of lives.

Prior to leading USAID, McPherson was the managing partner of the Washington office of the law firm Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease. He also served as Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the Office of Presidential Personnel during the Ford administration.

McPherson has served on an array of boards over the years, including as Chair of the Board of Directors at Dow Jones and Company. He served as Chair of the Board for Harvest Plus, an organization working to breed crops for better nutrition, the International Fertilizer Development Center, an organization addressing soil fertility and international agricultural development, and he was Co-founder and Chair of the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa. McPherson is also the former Chair of Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Commission. He was a Board of Trustees member for the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation.

McPherson has been recognized with a variety of awards throughout his career. These include the U.S. Presidential Certificate of Outstanding Achievement for “continued vision, initiative, and leadership in efforts to achieve a world without hunger;” the Secretary of State Distinguished Leadership Award; the Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton Award; UNICEF award for “Outstanding Contributions to Child Survival;” the Jewish National Fund Tree of Life Award; the National Public Service Award from the American Society for Public Administration; as well as the Banker of the Year Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Bankers Association for Finance and Trade.

McPherson holds a bachelor’s degree from Michigan State University, an M.B.A. from Western Michigan University, and a J.D. from American University. McPherson and his wife Joanne have four children and six grandchildren.