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MIZZOU

A Global Mizzou

MU director of international admissions exports the Mizzou brand worldwide.



Director of International Admissions John Wilkerson visited his 80th country on an international recruiting trip to Cambodia in October. Photo by Rob Hill.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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In 2012, John Wilkerson made more trips to Kuala Lumpur than to Kansas City. As part of MU's international recruitment initiative, the director of international admissions is exporting the Mizzou brand worldwide.

On opening day fall 2013, there were 172 first-time college international students enrolled at MU, up more than 30 percent from the previous year. Total international enrollment is 2,109, up more than 3 percent from the previous year. That's still only 2 percent of the undergraduate population. Wilkerson says the goal is to increase that to 3 percent during the next five years.

To better position the university among the more than 4,200 higher education institutions in the United States, Mizzou organized two groups that travel to high schools internationally, speaking to counselors, students and parents. The first, Midwest Educational Tour, is a group of about 15 top universities from Missouri, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and the Dakotas, including large public research institutions, all-women's schools and liberal arts colleges. The second tour group is Black and Gold, a collection of schools in the Association of American Universities that also wear black and gold, such as University of Colorado Boulder, University of Iowa and Purdue.

The recruitment groups help educate international students about the Midwest, hoping to cement it as a

cultural, educational and business destination.

“[International students] are really identifying the quintessential American university experience as happening more in the Midwest,” he says. “It was exciting to hear a student say to me, ‘If I go to New York, I think that’ll be a New York experience. I want an American experience.’ Well, here we are.”



John Wilkerson, MU director of international admissions, answers questions about the University of Missouri at the Tarsus American Academy in Turkey. Photo courtesy of John Wilkerson.

The U.S. Department of State is taking notice. In June, the state department asked Wilkerson to speak at the EducationUSA Forum on a panel of three institutions that best target countries to watch. In May, he presented at the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers: Association for International Educators conference in St. Louis, and in February 2014, he’ll present to senior-level international officers of the Association of International Educators in Washington, D.C. Wilkerson and his colleagues have been asked to provide advisory services for 10 universities, including three AAU schools.

Using statistical analysis and external and internal data to determine where to target next, Mizzou recruits heavily from the Middle East, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Wilkerson says they are starting to see a larger applicant pool from Europe, too. He

frequently gets calls from high school counselors wondering when the two tours are coming to their part of the globe.

“When you’re going into a recruitment region, you want to be the recruiter who gets out of the car and the high school counselor gives you a hug,” Wilkerson says. “We’re there now in Latin America and Southeast Asia.”

Mizzou is viewed as a leader among institutions in international programming, Wilkerson says.

“The descriptors we keep hearing applied to ourselves, which is phenomenal, is that Mizzou is in a pattern of smart, sustainable growth,” he says.

To address the growth of international admissions — and the office’s increasingly distinct mandate from domestic admissions — the unit spun off from the Office of Admissions and now directly reports to the Division of Enrollment Management.

Wilkerson plans to hire an assistant director for international recruitment, which will allow Wilkerson to be in the office more. But he won’t be putting away his passport any time soon.

He’s visiting 23 countries this fall, traveling with the Black and Gold tour through Latin America, the Pacific and Turkey. He’ll hit his 80th country in

Cambodia on the Midwest Educational Tour of Southeast Asia.

“There is no replacement for the education you learn at 2 a.m. on a bus in Guadalajara, just talking to colleagues and to students, keeping your finger on the pulse of what’s going on,” Wilkerson says. “If you truly are going to be a global university, especially in the Midwest, you have to bring the globe to you. We’re seen as a leader in that field.”

[Read more about how Mizzou is an international force.](#)

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