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SECTIONS

- Front Page
- News
- Editorial
- Sports
- Life & Times
- Archive

OPTIONS

- Maroon Podcasts
- Register
- Login
- About Us
- Message Board
- Events Calendar
- Letter to the Editor
- Classifieds
- Back Issues
- Search

24 HOUR NEWS

- Press Releases

LINKS

- Loyola Home
- The Times-
- Picayune/Nola.com
- The New York Times
- USA Today
- CNN
- The Onion
- Loymail
- Maroon Katrina Blog

Home > News

Peruvian visitor fires up kitchen

Kayla August

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Print Email DoubleClick Any Word Page 1 of 1

Students who ventured to the Orleans Room for lunch Oct. 10 were treated to something new along with their usual salads, wraps and pizza. Surrounded by Peruvian flags and a colorfully decorated service area, a man with a thick accent and white chef's hat dished out exotic offerings to the curious, adventurous or just plain hungry.

Chef Juan Carlos Barzola visited Loyola as a participant in the Global Chef Program, a kitchen exchange program that brings visiting chefs and their native cuisines to college campuses around the world.

"I feel at home here," Barzola said. "The food is a little spicy and a little sweet like we have in Peru."

Peruvian cuisine is a blend of Amerindian and Spanish food, with influences from African, Arab, Italian and Japanese cooking. Barzola's experience has placed him behind the stoves of many prestigious restaurants, cruise ships and hotels, including the JW Marriott Hotel in Lima, Peru, where he is currently food production manager. Despite his accomplishments, Barzola said he gained as much from Loyola's dining staff as they gained from him.

"I always learn. I learn every day from everybody," he said.

Barzola's kitchen cameo at Loyola followed a visit to neighboring Tulane University as part of a 25-day tour that will take him to campuses across the United States. Sponsored by food service company Sodexo, the Global Chef Program has brought Barzola to Greece, Spain and Italy.

After two days in New Orleans, Barzola said he would like to return someday to do less cooking and more eating. Barzola said New Orleans is a "good city, (with) good hospitality, good people and great food."

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