The 1994 Winter Olympics is well underway in Oslo, Norway, but USL played host this weekend to a world-class olympic event of its own. The 10 members of the 1996 Culinary Team USA have been visiting the campus and the area since Thursday, observing and studying Cajun cuisine. The team members were selected in a national competition and represent the best chefs in the country.

The visit is in preparation for the Culinary Olympics, to be held in Frankfurt, Germany in October, 1996. The last one in 1992 attracted the leading chefs in the world, with participation from over 30 countries in five continents.

The USL stop is one of many practice sessions that Culinary Team USA engages in to prepare for this world class competition.

While here, the team prepared a feast last night for 32 people at USL’s Hamilton Hall. The $200 ticket price entitled diners to a seven course meal with matching wines, a commemorative photograph of the occasion and a copy of the team’s newest cookbook. Proceeds go toward the USL scholarship fund for hospitality management students, the American Culinary Foundation and Culinary Team USA.

Keith Keogh, team manager and executive chef at Walt Disney World’s EPCOT Center, arranged the visit with Dr. Linda Vincent-Broussard, director of USL’s hospitality management program. Keogh was here last fall to judge the Acadiana Culinary Classic, and he and the other Disney chefs were taken with the food and its cooking methods. This prompted the return visit. ‘The purpose of Team USA is research and development,’ he explains. ‘Our mission in Louisiana is to obtain knowledge from the chefs of the area on the true roots of Cajun and Creole cuisine.’ Keogh is also anxious to extend this learning experience to students, therefore the university’s involvement.

“It is a goal of our team to expose as many students and young people to our mission as possible. USL, with its culinary program, gives us that opportunity, as well as it has a staff and local chefs’ organization that understands our target and needs, and will assist us in accomplishing our mission,” he says.

USL hospitality management students assisted Culinary Team USA as apprentices during the practice sessions and meal functions. The experience afforded them a new perspective and high standards to adhere to in the future, says Vincent-Broussard.

“This visit is a real compliment to USL, to the local food, and to our area chefs,” she says. “It’s very rare that they visit a university, and the fact that they are here speaks highly for USL. It’s quite an honor to be selected for this kind of attention.”

Next month, the team is scheduled for a practice meal at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, where they will study cuisine from the Northeast.

Today, Culinary Team USA observes Louisiana chefs from the American Culinary Foundation, as they prepare local dishes. Some of the participants include nationally prominent chef Paul Prudhomme, his sister Enola Prudhomme and John Folse, from Donaldsonville. The team also visited restaurants in Acadiana during their stay and observed various Cajun food preparations.