Before starting his job at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Cypress Lake Dining Hall Executive Chef Chad Matrana grew up in New Orleans and has always enjoyed food.

"I was born and raised in New Orleans, and just being around that culture and being around the people ... It was really easy to understand the cuisine of Louisiana," Matrana said.

"When I went away to culinary school, it was very easy to start connecting the dots to flavor profiles because I had a good foundation. I just have a love affair with this state and that's really what made me want to become a chef," Matrana said.

However, being a chef did not come naturally.

"You know it wasn't always my first career choice, but after high school and working in fine dining restaurants, I really started taking itseriously," Matrana said.

Before coming to work at UL Lafayette, Matrana says he has worked at a multitude of places.

"I worked at Loyola and I was their executive chef," Matrana said. "I also worked at Commander's Palace. I've also worked at some of the top ten restaurants in the country, so my chef (experience) is really more fine dining restaurant experience than this type of setting."

Matrana described what it was like to feed so many students in the cafeteria.

"It's exciting," Matrana said. "Every day is a new day to get better. It's like instant gratification when you prepare meals for this many people and you do it with the success that we've had. I would say that's it's challenging; it can be very challenging at times. It's definitely rewarding at the same time."

Matrana always has a positive outlook on his job.

"The best parts are making people feel welcome, and when you come here you have to leave your comfort zone," Matrana said. "You're leaving your parents and you're coming to college to be a young adult and be on your own for the first time in your life. So I'd like to give students a sense of home and a sense of being comfortable in their surroundings."

Matrana could only think of one negative aspect.

"We have issues in terms of challenges that happen, the unforeseen things like food trucks being late or something like that," Matrana said.

In his spare time, Matrana goes to the farmer's market to encourage people to eat healthier.

"Executive Chef at UL Lafayette's Cypress Lake Dining Hall will be at the market this Saturday serving samples of a couple of popular Eat Fit meals from their menu: Blackened Shrimp Tacos with Cilantro-Lime Crema and Grilled Redfish and Cauliflower Taco, w/ roasted Corn and Heirloom Tomato Guacamole," a Facebook post by Delcambre Seafood & Farmers Market reads.

Matrana designed Eat Fit to make the UL Lafayette dining food fit seamlessly into the culture, while still giving the students a balanced diet.

"Matrana, with the help of [Yvette] Quantz [at Ochsner Hospital], has designed the Eat Fit meals at UL Lafayette's Cypress Lake Dining Hall around Cajun foods indigenous to the area," an article from the Daily Iberian reads.

The same article broke down the elements of an Eat Fit meal.

"Eat Fit meals must have no more than 600 calories, 800 milligrams of sodium, five grams of added sugar, and eight grams of animal-based animal fat," the article reads.

Matrana explained why Eat Fit makes UL Lafayette special.

"We're the first university in the state of Louisiana to bring Eat Fit to a University," Matrana said. "LSU doesn't have it; Tulane doesn't have it. It just provides people better options to live a healthier lifestyle. To have better choices."