Samantha Sawyer

Black and white Old Dominion University students are united in their opposition to the closing of a beloved chicken restaurant, Raising Cane’s Chicken Fingers, a mainstay on campus since 2016.

On April 21, the only Raising Cane’s in Hampton Roads - that’s open to the public - will be replaced with a Chick-fil-A on ODU’s campus. Raising Cane’s and all of its locations are moving towards being fully company owned and operated, according to an announcement made on ODU Dining’s social media pages.

“The Raising Canes on campus was doing better than the regular stores (brand owned locations) financially and popularly, which caught the attention of the CEO of Raising Canes,” said Vice President of Auxiliary Services at ODU Todd Johnson.

The corporate branch of Raising Canes sent a letter two years ago saying that they wouldn’t renew their franchise license unless ODU let them buy back their store and split the revenue 90% to 10%.

This led to ODU replacing Raising Cane’s with a Chick-fil-A that will open in August, even though there is already a Chik-fil-A in ODU’s dining hall. Once this location closes, the closest Raising Cane’s, open to the public, will be in Richmond on Virginia Commonwealth University’s campus.

The only other Raising Cane’s location in the Hampton Roads area will be on a Navy Base in Norfolk and is only available to Navy employees.

This decision has received a lot of back-lash from the general public with some people asking why not replace the location with a business that’s not already on campus.

“This is so pointless, [SIC] we don’t need another chic-fil-a. [SIC] if we’re replacing canes then put something new on campus,” said an Instagram commenter, under ODU Dining’s post, which gained 120 likes.

A second Chik-fil-A on campus will give students better and faster access to the restaurant.

“That Chick-fil-A (in ODU’s dining hall) is always so crowded, so I think it will help to have

two separate locations, but I am disappointed because I do go to that Chick-fil-A; it’s not far,”

said Physical Therapy Grad student Emily Duvall.

ODU’s Physical Therapy building is down the street from Raising Cane’s so Duvall and her

classmates frequently go to the location.

ODU alumni and locals are also upset over the change.

“I drive out here all the time after graduating since 2015,” said another Facebook commenter under the post. “So many great food places came and went at ODU [SIC] such a shame for real.”

There were even comments from Great Bridge, Chesapeake, from customers who drove thirty minutes to get Raising Cane’s.

Despite public outcry, Chick-fil-A is the second most popular brand on ODU’s campus, after Raising Canes, according to Johnson.

“I’ve been at five colleges and in the food service industry for 40 years and at every school I’ve been to, Chick-fil-A is the most popular brand.

However, in a virtual ODU town hall meeting that took place on Feb. 15, many students had other suggestions.

The staff at ODU’s Raising Canes have received few complaints, but once the location closes the employees will have to be moved to other ODU dining operations, according to Resident District Manager Janet Mclaughlin.

Due to the pandemic, ODU’s dining facilities, which usually had 600 employees, is now operating at 50% capacity, according to Mclaughlin.

Since operating hours at many of ODU’s dining facilities have been cut short, Raising Cane’s gives an alternative option by staying open until midnight from Thursday to Saturday and until 10 pm from Sunday to Wednesday.

“Raising Canes is the only late-night option on campus, so I do see a lot of students in the chat that are concerned,” said Myles Nixon, ODU’s SGA (Student Government Association) President who helped organize the town hall.

Mclaughlin hopes that once the pandemic subsides, ODU’s dining service can expand their hours.

To speed that process up, ODU has raised the hourly wage of entry level dining positions to $14 - $15 per hour and added signing bonuses.

“It’s always been fast, always been great,” said Mechanical Engineering student Tyler Brenner.

“Sad it’s closing because I think everybody really likes it.”

This hot button issue has caused students to start a poll demanding that Raising Canes stay,

according to Computer Science student Drake Treyshaun.

“I’ve heard a couple people talking about it,” added Brenner’s friend, Michael Guye, a

Biomedical Sciences major.

The manager and employees of the Raising Cane’s on campus said they would not comment, due to ODU’s solicitation policy.

While Johnson agrees that the decision to shut down Raising Canes was complicated, and overall, a financial issue, he wanted to make it clear that the new Chick-fil-A wasn’t necessarily permanent and that they’re willing to look at other options.

“Almost every national brand on campus is there because of student feedback,” said Johnson. “Future dining is a blank slate where we’re looking for student feedback before making a decision.”

However, it’s not as easy as some students believe, according to Janet Mclaughlin, ODU’s Resident District Manager.

“We get a lot of requests (from students) for brands who don’t license to colleges and universities, said Mclaughlin.

For ODU students who have questions about these new changes to the dining facilities or would like to make a suggestion, they can send an email to dining@odu.edu.