

# BEYOND THE FIRST SEMESTER: UNPACKING STUDENT MOTIVATION AND RETENTION CHALLENGES IN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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## Introduction

Despite being a critical language designated by the U.S. State Department, Russian courses at UAF experience significant drop-off after one or two semesters. This student-driven research project explores why students start Russian, why many stop, and what support structures could help them continue.

## Research Questions

1. What personal, professional, or academic factors drive students to enroll in Russian?
2. Why do students discontinue after 1-2 semesters?
3. What role do mentorship, clubs, and study-abroad play in retention?

## Methods

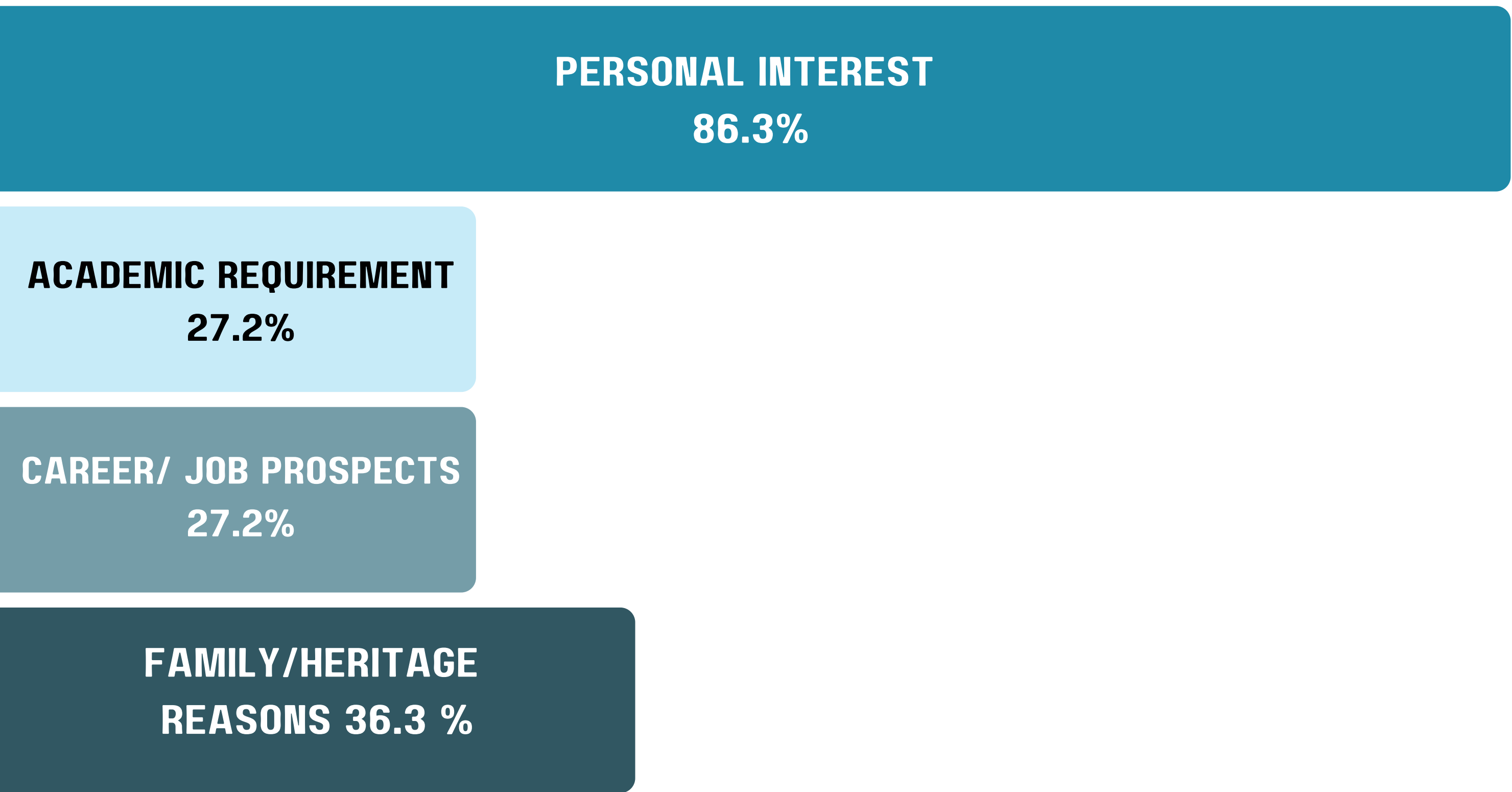
- **Survey:** Distributed to current and former Russian students.
- **Interviews:** Conducted with both continuing and discontinuing students.
- **Institutional Analysis:** Reviewed support structures (e.g., clubs, mentors, study abroad).
- **Frameworks Used:**
  - **Self-Determination Theory** (intrinsic/extrinsic motivation)
  - **Tinto's Theory of Retention** (integration & support)

## Acknowledgements

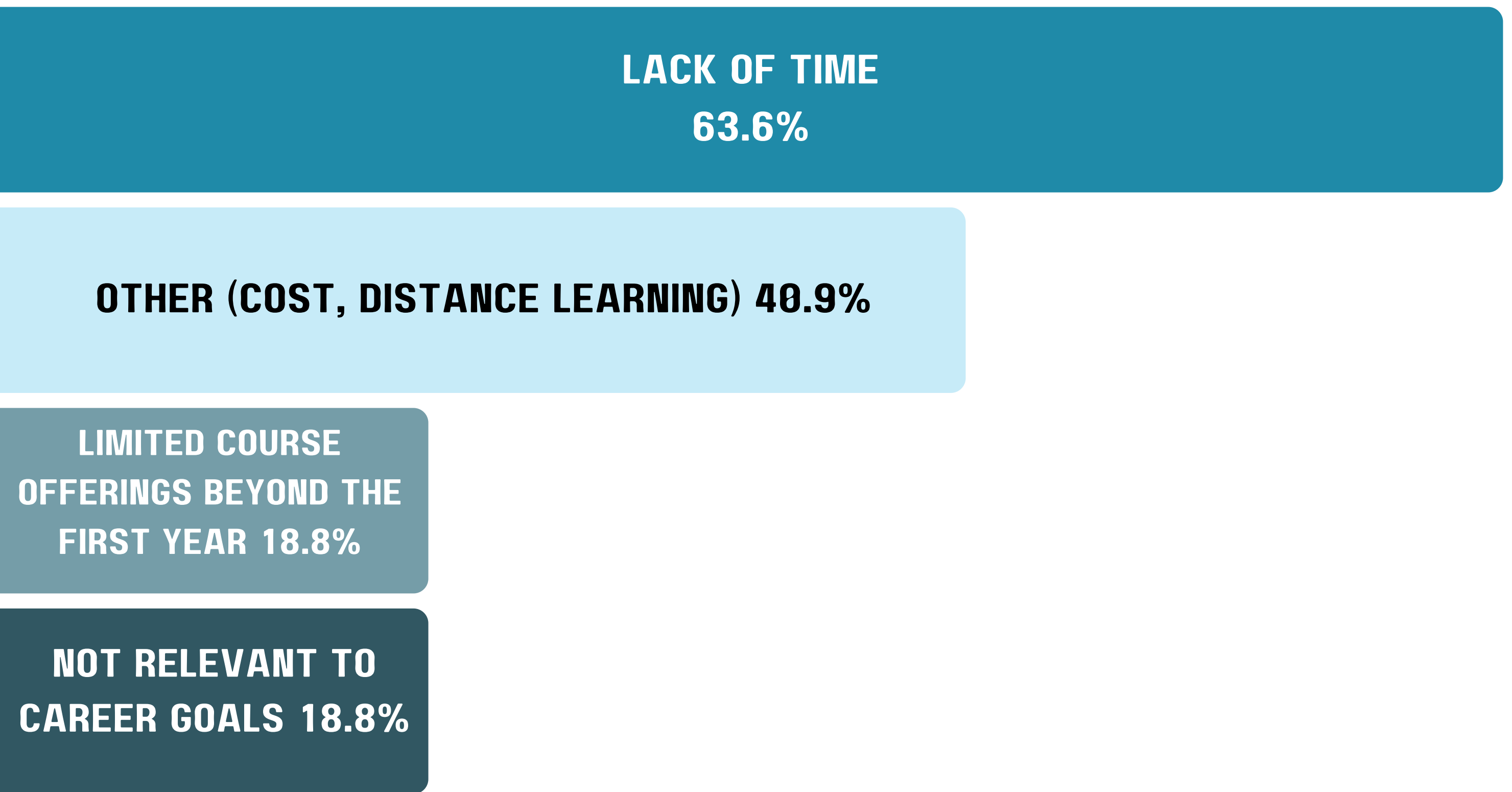
- **UAF Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity (URSA)**
- **Dr. Wendy Whitehead Martelle** - Faculty Mentor, College of Liberal Arts

## Findings

### WHAT FACTORS DROVE STUDENTS TO ENROLL IN RUSSIAN?



### WHAT FACTORS DROVE STUDENTS TO STOP RUSSIAN AT UAF?



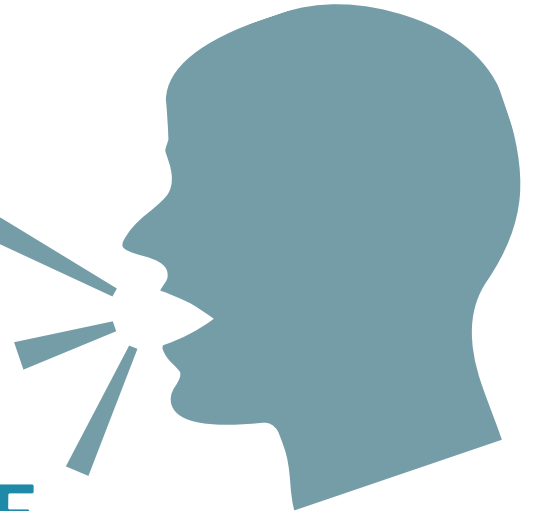
1. INSTAGRAM PAGE
2. VIRTUAL/IN-PERSON CHAT CLUBS
3. POTENTIAL HYBRID COURSES (IN-PERSON + ONLINE)

“TAKING RUSSIAN CLASSES AT UAF RE-AWAKENED MY INNER IDENTITY OF BEING RUSSIAN”

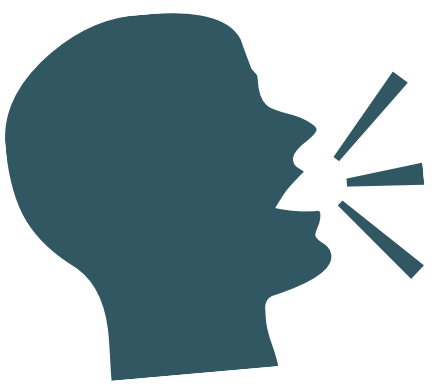


“IF THERE WAS MORE CLASSES OFFERED PAST BASIC CLASSES.”

“CONSISTENT OFFERINGS FOR SECOND YEAR AND THIRD YEAR STUDY.”

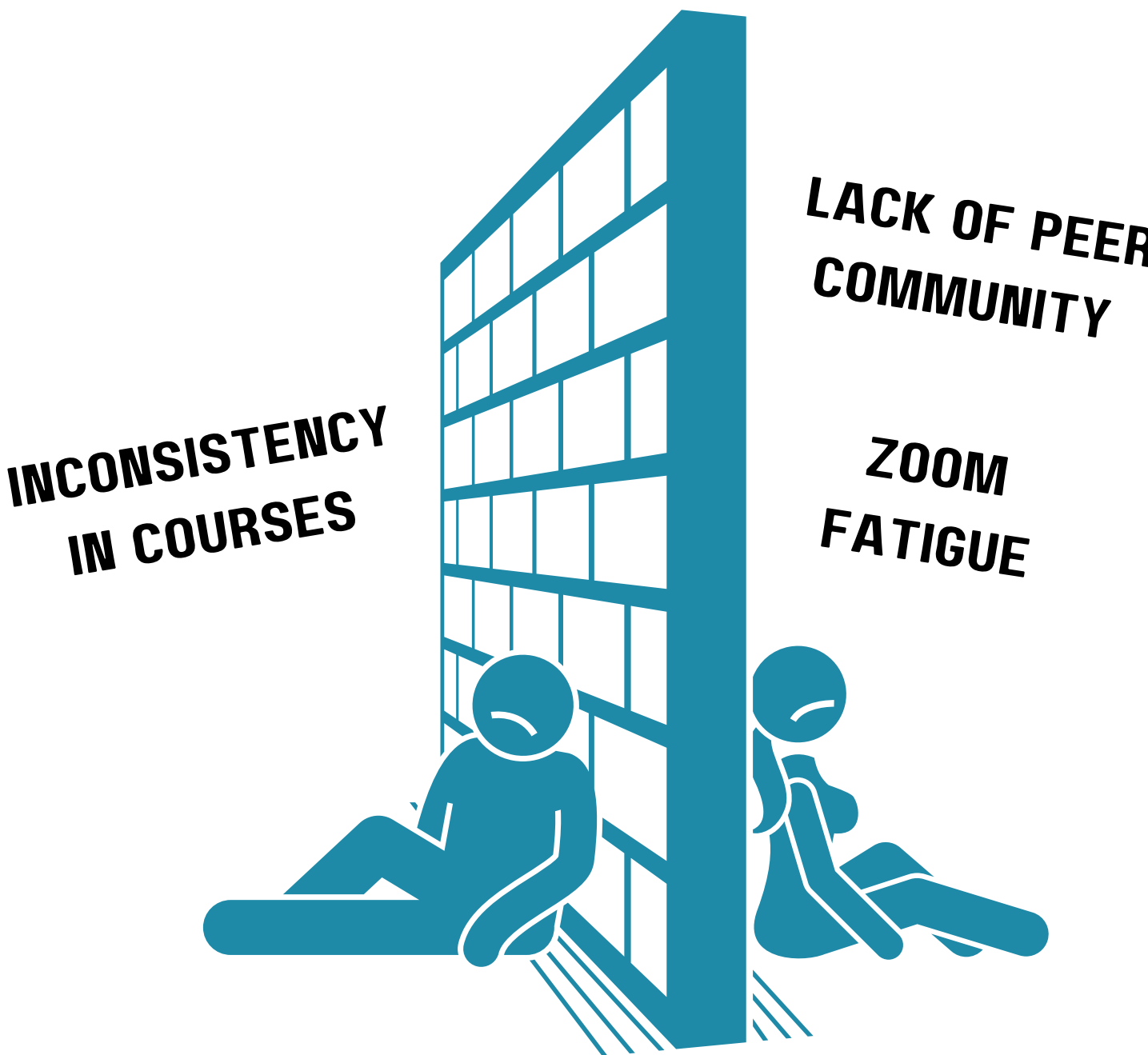


“FELT MY TIME COULD BE BETTER SPENT WITH ONLINE TUTORS RATHER THAN PAYING MORE TO SELF LEARN”



“DISTANCE LEARNING A LANGUAGE IS DIFFICULT”

“SINCE IT WAS A ZOOM CLASS I COULDN'T EASILY TALK TO OTHER STUDENTS”



COMMON BARRIERS



TOP 3 SUPPORT NEEDS

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