Distributed by UW News Service December 1, 2025

Link to original story: <https://www.uwec.edu/stories/worlds-words-elva-crist-language-honors-and-global-learning>

Worlds of words: Elva Crist on language, honors and global learning

**Story by Cami Hoth, UW-Eau Claire second-year junior**

Driven by a deep passion for language, Elva Crist has shaped her University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire journey around global education and cross-cultural connection. From joining the Mark Stephen Cosby Honors College to studying abroad in Iceland to earning a teaching English as a foreign language certificate, Crist’s story is one of curiosity, courage and an unwavering desire to teach and learn across borders.

Crist was a second-semester transfer to UW-Eau Claire after completing her first college semester at a small public university in Minnesota.

“I was kind of brought here by necessity, but I'm very happy that necessity brought me here,” she says.

Since arriving at UW-Eau Claire, the New Richmond native has studied abroad, earned internships and worked as an academic apprentice, each an experience that has shaped her life goals beyond her work as an undergraduate honors student.

**Forging a language of honors**

While she arrived with many passions, Crist’s time at UW-Eau Claire has helped her develop wider curiosities and a defined academic plan. She knew she had a passion for words and enjoyed the nuance of studying English, but she was uncertain about its efficacy as a career.

“I was concerned about practicality,” she says, “but it’s always what I’ve loved.”

Crist used that love of language to broaden her professional pathways. She will graduate in Spring 2027 not merely with a bachelor’s degree in English, but with a linguistics emphasis, too, alongside German and history minors and a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) certificate.

“I've always loved history,” she explains. “And then German … I just wanted to take German. It was recommended to me. And, of course, I’m a languages person.”

When she arrived at UW-Eau Claire, Crist was also invited to join the Cosby Honors College. Crist found her footing quickly in honors, where she used her linguistic savvy to pick up other vocabularies, dabbling in a wide variety of special topics and unique honors courses.

“A lot of the things that I've loved here have come out of honors,” she recalls.

Despite an already extensive academic plan, Crist has thrived as an honors college student. In fact, university honors has helped her make crucial interdisciplinary connections from the very beginning.

“The first honors course I took here was run by Dr. [Kaishan] Kong, who runs the TEFL program,” she says, a course that inspired her to pursue a TEFL certificate.

Under Kong, the [**TEFL program**](https://www.uwec.edu/academics/programs/undergraduate/teaching-english-foreign-language) equips students with new ways to think about language acquisition, intercultural teaching methods and teaching English internationally.

Through the honors college, Crist says, she found many chances to learn about internationalism and multiculturalism, both of which have been crucial to her success as a global communicator. Crist also appreciates the support the honors college staff provides, from academic advising to future career skills.

“The amount of support and passion that is in the people that run the honors program is just amazing.”

Part of that support is owed to honors director Dr. Heather Fielding, who has designed honors in part to help teach students the hidden curriculum of college and professional life.

"I didn't have the insider knowledge, per se," says Crist. "Just having people explain it is very nice.”

**A way with words**

Outside of academics and university honors, Crist has been involved in several local organizations. A writer for The Spectator, UW-Eau Claire’s student-run newspaper, she has penned over a half-dozen articles since February, reviewing music performances, covering art exhibitions and reporting on the accessibility needs of UW-Eau Claire’s campus.

For more than a year Crist has worked in McIntyre Library’s archives, too. She started out as a volunteer, then took a position as an intern, and now serves as an official employee in the archives, where her passions for history, language and library work have helped her thrive. Crist is also serving as an academic apprentice under Dr. Josh Brown, professor of German and linguistics, leading classes and study sessions for students taking English 221: Introductory English Linguistics.

Additionally, Crist works as an intern for the Chippewa Valley Writers Guild, an organization directed by B.J. Hollars, professor of English. She has written articles on local events, authors and publications, and assisted in both copywriting and proofreading for Barstow & Grand, an annual print journal that highlights writers from the Chippewa Valley and the Upper Midwest.

“It provides ample opportunities to write professionally and to make connections within the valley's robust literary community,” Crist says.

**A term abroad**

One of the most rewarding opportunities for Crist was studying abroad, where her prior language skills would meet a new challenge: Icelandic. The best way to achieve mastery over language, Crist knew, was to submerge herself in it completely and study it where it was spoken. Her time in Iceland was her first time going abroad by herself, but it fostered her independence. And her success at UW-Eau Claire gave her confidence amid a new language and culture.

“Living in Reykjavík (and also in Hveragerði for about a week), walking around the hills, eating Icelandic food and spending so much time with Icelanders all made me realize how much I love Iceland.”

No doubt many more words — and many more worlds — await Crist after her eventual graduation. For now, only one thing is certain: She wants to return to Europe. She is weighing her options for graduate school in Germany, in a linguistics program or in language education.

She also hopes to apply for an English teaching assistant position through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program. With the help of her TEFL certificate, a Fulbright grant would allow Crist to teach English abroad — and she's been dreaming of a return to Iceland's rolling hills.