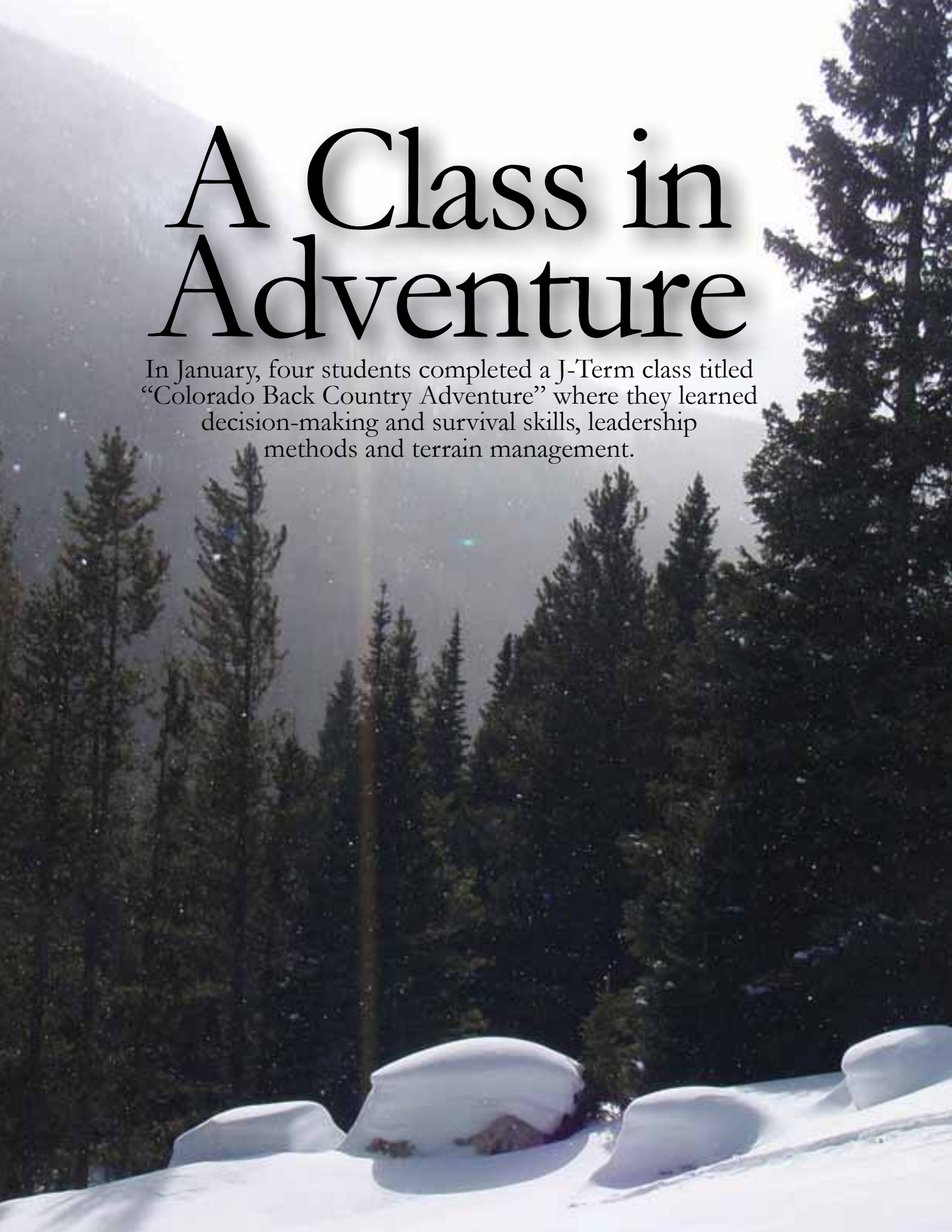


A Class in Adventure

In January, four students completed a J-Term class titled “Colorado Back Country Adventure” where they learned decision-making and survival skills, leadership methods and terrain management.





Along with their guide, students Sam Smolnisky, '11, Matt Braithwaite, '11, Bridger Bjorklund, '12 and Torstein Tengsareid navigated Colorado's back country in January.

For Mark Greeno, head of Augustana's Outdoor Club, the ultimate classroom is clear of desks and chairs. It's sans a wireless network; free of expensive textbooks and yellow highlighters; and it's heated and cooled by Mother Nature herself.

For Greeno, nature is the best classroom. Take the snow-covered mountains and towering evergreen trees that were the "classroom" for Greeno's January Interim Class, rightfully entitled, "Colorado Back Country Adventure."

During the 13-day course, students Sam Smolnisky, '11, Matt Braithwaite, '11, Bridger Bjorklund, '12 and Torstein Tengsareid, a Norwegian exchange student, honed their downhill skiing skills and received real-life, on-the-job training in terrain management, leadership methods, survival tactics and decision-making.

They also learned the value of teamwork, camaraderie and collaboration.

"There's an old cliché that says, "every day is an adventure." For us, that was an absolute true statement during January. Some days we would be starting the day at 10,000 feet and climbing to a 12,000-foot peak. Other days we would be up to our waists in powdery snow searching for rescue beacons. Mornings were spent learning about snow quality and rescue scenarios, and in the afternoons, we would put our knowledge to

the test," said Smolnisky.

The students were based at a hotel in Boulder, Colo., and divided their time between classroom-type instruction on avalanche detection techniques, evaluating weather conditions, reading snow pack reports and identifying escape zones with daily downhill skiing in the back country. The instruction and the field work were led by Greeno and Markus Beck, a native of Switzerland and a certified survival and climate guide.

"We'd start at 7 a.m. and get back to the hotel around 8 p.m. each night. These kids pushed themselves physically and mentally yet, so many times throughout the course the guys came up to me and said, 'Mark, this is the greatest experience of my life.' Sure they learned how to survive in the back country, but in reality, they learned so much more than that. What they learned about making good, safe decisions can apply to any situation they encounter from here on out – those skills will be with them their entire lives."

Smolnisky agrees.

"It is hard to comprehend what it is like to push yourself farther than you ever thought you could go. We did this day in and day out. This was a humbling trip for me because I was able to further my respect for Mother Nature. She is powerful and strong, beautiful and magical. I learned that I cannot overcome nature; I can only walk with her. We tread carefully in the mountains, making

sure we respected their sheer magnificence. Sometimes we walked on dirt, rocks, snow, and ice that could've crumbled beneath our feet at any moment. Our guides taught us how to travel safely on such terrain and manage the inherent risk involved with traveling and skiing in the back country. He taught us how to survey the land, ask the right questions so we can have fun, but most importantly, to be able to do this the next day. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I am a small part of this amazing world, and this experience allowed me to see my place, and all that it has to offer."

In addition to teaching health and physical education classes, Greeno, a former physical education teacher and cross country and track coach, leads the Outdoor Program as a way to involve students, faculty and staff in outdoor activities. Since the Program's initial meeting two years ago, attendance has tripled.

The Outdoor Club takes participants on a variety of outdoor adventures, depending on the season and the weather, including rock climbing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing and hiking.

"Fresh air cleanses the soul. When you're outside, you're exercising and you don't even know it. I believe in physical fitness and mental fitness – when you're outdoors, you see things differently, from a different perspective. It leads to an entirely different level of productivity," Greeno said.