



Numerous factors played a role in this incident.

While the decision to attempt a route neither instructor had climbed previously is potentially arguable, the instructors made their most significant error by not assuming the lead position throughout the climb. With a single day of snow school in good condition under their collective belts, students were not technically prepared to manage their own risk. Had both instructors been in the lead they would likely have recognized the changing slope angle, aspect, snow conditions, and potential consequences prior to students entering the "danger zone" and set-up a belay, fixed line, or turned back. By choosing to follow their students on the route they inadvertently placed a higher priority on the students final experience than their safety and set the stage for the incident.

By pairing an assistant instructor with a strong personal climbing background with a less technically experienced lead instructor who none-the-less had more experience managing student groups in the mountains, the program administration set the tone for potential site management errors. This potential was exacerbated by a Standard Operating Procedure that permitted course instructors to choose a route neither were intimately familiar with. This played itself out poorly when the instructor team recognized the lead student was having difficulty kicking steps and the lead instructor asked the assistant to evaluate the slope risk. The error was compounded when he did not climb the route and discuss the risk and site management in detail with his assistant before permitting students to climb through. The simple observation that a fall had the potential to end in serious injury or death if someone slipped and went over the cliff band warranted a belay or fixed line was not discussed and apparently went unnoticed.

