Williams College ski team have qualified for the NCAA Skiing Championships March 8-11 being hosted by the University of New Hampshire at Cannon Mountain [Franconia, N.H.] and The Jackson Ski Touring Center in Jackson, N.H.

Three Eph men will compete in the two Nordic races, while one Eph woman will compete in the two Alpine events. Representing the Ephs in the Nordic events will be sophomore Braden Becker, senior Jordan Fields, and senior Eli Hoenig.

Sophomore Hannah Hunsaker will be competing in both the Slalom and the giant Slalom Alpine events at Cannon Mountain. Hunsaker will be the first Eph to compete at the 2017 championships when she takes to the top of the hill on March 8 to make her first run in the giant Slalom event that begins at 9:00 a.m.

Hunsaker will then return on Friday the 10th to compete in the Slalom that will also begin at 9:00 a.m.

A year ago Hunsaker finished ninth in the Slalom to earn All-America honors. This season Hannah Hunsaker posted four top10 EISA finishes. Her best finish came in the Slalom competition at Middlebury where she captured fourth place. In the Giant Slalom at Dartmouth Hunsaker was 5th and at the St. Lawrence University Carnival she was 8th in the Giant Slalom and 9th in the Slalom.

"Hannah has had a very strong season," noted Eph Alpine head coach Kelsey Levine. "Her skiing is faster than it has been. The field is deeper than during freshman year but she has stepped up with the field. She is very even in both events. She came in as a Slalom skier but put down Giant Slalom results this season to show she is a strong two-event collegiate skier."

The competition at both the Nordic and Alpine events will be staged at locations that the Ephs have competed at this season at the UNH Carnival. "It never hurts to know the race hill," stated Levine. "This track is new to ski racing this year so there is still a lot to be learned about how different sets will flow and work the skiers on the hill. It's exciting to be at such a new venue".

A year ago the Ephs competed in Colorado at the 2016 NCAA Championships. "Hannah is from the west so going out to Colorado last year was a bit of a homecoming for her and she was excited about that. It certainly is easier on the schoolwork to stay closer to Williamstown."

The three Eph Nordic competitors will open their racing in the 10k Classical race that with feature an individual start at the Jackson Ski Touring Center at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday.
The Nordic skiers will close out the championships when they race again on Saturday in the 20K freestyle mass start race that will commence at 10:00 a.m.

**Eli Hoenig** is making his fourth consecutive appearance at the NCAA Championships. For **Braden Becker** and **Jordan Fields** this will be their debut on the NCAA Championships stage.

At the 2016 NCAA Championships in Colorado **Eli Hoenig** captured All-America honors with a 6th place finish in the 20K mass start classic race.

This winter the Eph Nordic team made history. For the first time in the Eastern Intercollegiate Skiing Association (EISA) annals an Eph man won a Nordic race. Hoenig took top honors in the 10k classic individual start race at the Bates Carnival, which served as the NCAA Eastern Regional, finishing in 28:56.0. **Braden Becker** took second in a time of 29:05.6 and **Jordan Fields** was timed in 29:56.1 to finish sixth, giving the Ephs three finishers in the top six.

The very next day the Ephs made more team history as their second place team finish in the 20k freestyle mass start delivered the Ephs the Nordic team title for the weekend. This time it was **Jordan Fields** leading the Ephs. Fields was timed in 51:22.5, which secured him second place. **Eli Hoenig** was third in 51:48.9 and **Braden Becker** made it three Ephs in the top seven when he crossed the finish line in 52:13.3.

All told the Ephs placed four skiers out of a possible six on the podiums for the weekend. "We have been building toward a season like this for the past several years," said Eph head Nordic coach Jason Lemieux. "The team knew it was possible, but it took a lot of things coming together to make it a reality. This team has certainly written some history this year for Williams skiing. Many firsts were accomplished, including the first individual distance cross country event win for a Williams Skier."

"During the carnival season we have four NCAA distance classic races," added Lemieux. "The men's team won every one of them and was undefeated for the season. For any school this is a huge accomplishment, but to be on the top step of the EISA podium so many times as a NESCAC school and race against Division I programs is absolutely incredible. They also won the 20K skate at the UNH Carnival and took the overall weekend victory (both races combined) at the Bates Carnival/NCAA Regional Championships finishing, first in the 10K classic and second in the 20k skate."

"Eli has been second quite a few times during the past two seasons," noted Lemieux. "Winning a carnival was one of Eli's goals when he came to Williams and it was so rewarding to see that goal be achieved during his final classic race. Having **Braden Becker** and **Jordan Fields** both finish second during the Regional Championships was also incredible, as being on the podium was a season long goal for both of them."

"Looking ahead to NCAAs I think this is likely the strongest group of Nordic men that we've ever sent to the championships," stated Lemieux. "It's a huge accomplishment just
to qualify and that is often the main goal. This year it's a little different for us with Eli ranked second for the EISA, Braden 4th and Jordan 7th (all three of them earned All East honors) and the team has different goals to match."

"I have confidence in these guys and it wouldn't surprise me to see all three of them inside the top 20 in both races," added Lemieux. "I think we have opportunities for a top 10 individual finish as well in both races. I feel like we're equally strong in both classic and skate with Eli and Braden leading the way in classic and Jordan in skate. They're headed into the championships with a goal of racing their best and continuing the momentum they have worked so hard all year to create."

Lemieux concluded by stating, "This team is so special. The camaraderie between athletes has built up a culture of hard work and training. They're breeding their own success and it's incredible to see the power of the team taking over on the racecourse. It's hard to put into words, but this team is a group of athletes that I am so proud to coach and to be able to spend so much time with"

All of which adds to the reason why Jason Lemieux was named the EISA Nordic Coach of the Year for the second consecutive year.