Who can I talk to about the different AOCs?

All students will have access to clearly designated faculty members who will be able to guide them through the process of choosing an Area of Concentration (AOC). Proactive faculty guidance will be individualized based on each student’s personal needs. At one extreme, some students will enter medical school with already highly focused areas of interest. They will be guided directly to the various choices that currently exist so that they can select the most attractive and closely matched AOC for themselves. At the other extreme, we expect many students will remain completely undifferentiated in their interests even after their first year (usually because they have many, varied interests). They will be individually guided by AOC faculty leaders through the “shopping around” process to potentially attractive AOCs until they are able to identify their choice. The first point of contact is meeting with one of the four AOC Exploratory Advisors (EAs) (Drs. Schafer, Brown, Finkel, and Pecker). At any time along the way, if a student has questions about a specific AOC, s/he can speak directly to the AOC Leader responsible for that specific AOC or reach out to their initial EA.

Will AOCs be offered at WCMC partner institutions?

Students may engage in SPs and find mentorships at any of our affiliated institutions (including Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, the Hospital for Special Surgery, and Rockefeller University). Some students may even wish to reach outside these institutions to pursue mentors for projects that best match their individual interests within any given AOC. However, the core activities of each AOC will continue to be overseen by WCMC. This will allow your home medical school to provide optimal quality control over the program. Even more importantly, it will enable students across all the years of medical school who have similar or complementary interests (within any given AOC) to form a small community that can provide peer mentoring and practical peer career guidance amongst its members.

I am not sure what area of medicine I want to go into. Will I be locked into an AOC?

Selecting an AOC in no way commits a student to a particular residency or area of medicine. The AOC program is not intended to serve the purpose of prematurely “specializing” students. It is intended to provide the students with the intellectually rewarding and rich experience of pursuing an area of interest in depth. The AOC program is designed to allow students to develop expertise in an area of their own interest, not to be channeled into a specific field of practice or research.

Can I design my own AOC?

Yes. One of the distinctive strengths of the AOC program is that it encourages students to pursue and creatively craft their own areas of interests. If a student’s interests are not adequately encompassed by one of the existing AOCs, they may wish to initiate creation of a new one. However, the creation of a new AOC does require finding one or more faculty sponsors. The AOC Pathway Leaders may be able to help identify willing faculty members if the student is unable to do so. Even if this is not possible, students will have broad latitude in designing their individual SPs (within their AOC) to be precisely aligned with their specific interests.
Can my summer research count towards SP credit?

Summer research between years 1 and 2 is not considered part of the AOC program, but is a useful opportunity to explore a research topic. Data obtained in a summer research program can be included in the future Scholarly Project if it is relevant, but research time spent in the first summer will not count as part of the 6 month block time for the SP.

Will the AOC have any connection to the fourth year electives I choose to take?

No. A student’s chosen AOC will not affect their ability to select from the full range of elective offerings.

When should I begin designing my SP?

Students may begin designing a SP as early as they wish. However, it is advisable to find a mentor before actually beginning work on the project. In fact, a SP can be chosen even before the AOC is chosen. In that case, if the student finds that particular SP worthwhile pursuing, s/he will subsequently find it quite easy to select the more general AOC within which it might fit.

When will I be expected to work on my SP?

All students will be allotted 6 months of blocked time during their third and fourth year of medical school. The time to work on your SP will occur in 2 different blocks, first 4 months starting after vacation in February of the third year, and is required of all students; and the second block of 2 months later on, which every students will choose themselves to best fit their schedule. See the blocks here.

Can I belong to more than one AOC at the same time?

Yes, we encourage maximal individualized flexibility for all students and will not discourage “lateral mobility” between the activities of different AOCs. However, a single AOC should be designated as a student’s “Primary” AOC, with one or more other AOCs designated as that student’s “Secondary” AOC(s), where this is desired by the student.

Can MSTP (M.D.-Ph.D.) students participate in an AOC?

MSTP students should be able to participate in the non-coursework aspects of a selected AOC (e.g. seminars, journal clubs, demonstrations, field trips, etc.) at the discretion of the research (Ph.D.) adviser, but are not be required to participate or declare a particular AOC. The Ph.D. thesis supplants the Scholarly Projects that will be required for M.D.-only students.
Is there a policy about whether “time out” for an elective research year (gap year), for example at the NIH or another institution, can count towards the “Scholarly Project” requirement of the AOC Program?

Yes, it can count, but the following sequence of steps would be required in advance of the elective research year. First the student must obtain WCMC institutional approval for the proposed research year. After that is obtained, the student must request consideration for the proposed research year to count towards “Scholarly Project” credit. The AOC Program leadership will then make this decision on a case-by-case basis in advance of the year away. In all cases, however, it will be required that an approved WCMC faculty member be designated as either a co-mentor or as a WCMC faculty sponsor for a student doing any off-campus project under the mentorship of a non-WCMC faculty member in order to qualify for credit as a “Scholarly Project”.

I imagine I might get a Step 1 score that is very competitive, and I will want to decide between competitive specialties- say, ophthalmology and ENT. I would like to complete electives in both these specialties before choosing. If I have to submit my application for ophthalmology in August, will I have time to take 2 electives after finishing clerkships but before applying? It seems like the required 4 month block of AOC will get in the way.

The main thing to remember is that WCMC students have always matched well and Class of 2018 is not starting electives any later than previous classes. In fact, you’re class will be available 2 weeks earlier than previous years. Remember that you will also have a two week elective block during your clerkships. You can spend that time exploring a field of your choice and in addition you can shadow physicians in various fields – a lot of medical students to that as well.

When scheduling the 4 month AOC SP Block 1, we involved 4th year students going into the more competitive residencies, Ortho, EM, Urology, etc and all of them said they could have made it work – i.e., done the AOC block at that time, and still done what they needed to do for residency – away electives, letters of support, being available for interviews at the right time, etc. It will certainly take thoughtful scheduling, but the students will not be disadvantaged by the AOC SP time. In fact, the students will have a lot to showcase come interview season with 4 month of research under their belt.