AOC FAQs updated 2/9/17

Are AOC and Scholarly Project the same thing?

No, AOC is a community of interested faculty and students that you can join. Scholarly Project is your individual research project, that you will engage in with your individual mentor.

Who can I talk to about the different AOCs?

All students will have access to Exploratory Advisers who will be able to guide them through the process of choosing an 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 Exploratory Advisers and various AOC 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.

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 Scholarly Project?

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.

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.