We created a program entitled the Area of Scholarly Concentration (AoSC) as part of our mission to mentor and educate students to become inquiry-driven physicians, educators, and researchers. This program allows students to gain expertise in an area of research interest that is unique and outside the regular course of study for the Doctor of Medicine degree.

Students immerse themselves in specific areas in research and develop a mentored relationship with a faculty member to help them design a four-year longitudinal project.

The AoSC Program currently includes 394 active projects, with 148 more to be added in spring 2016. Students can obtain funding (up to $1,000) for one-time travel if presenting a poster or giving an oral presentation at a conference. Additional funding may be available.
Area of Scholarly Concentration

Program Definition
The Area of Scholarly Concentration (AoSC) program is a mentored program which allows medical students to develop expertise in a specific area of interest during medical school. It focuses on training students to develop and complete a longitudinal project in a range of disciplines, including the biomedical sciences, social sciences, humanities, public health, global health, medical ethics, medical education and community service.

Program Goals
The goals of the program include the design and performance of an inquiry-driven, highly individualized scholarly project which culminates in the submission of a formal thesis during the fourth year of medical school. Projects are either scientific, hypothesis-driven investigations or longitudinal projects with a focused, detailed design appropriate for the specific area of study. AoSC projects enhance the student’s ability to identify and solve problems and develop mentored relationships with Northwestern University faculty members. Throughout each phase of the curriculum, there is protected time to allow students to work on their AoSC project.

Curriculum Integration

M1 and M2 years:
During the first year of medical school, students participate in introductory lectures providing an overview of the AoSC format, small group seminars, which will focus on helping them develop their longitudinal project, and selection of a mentor. Students select a mentor with the assistance of an already populated list of interested faculty and the guidance of their assigned small group advisor.

With the assistance of their selected mentor and small group advisor, students submit a thesis proposal, which will be formally reviewed. After the proposal is accepted, students initiate their project during a four-to-eight-week period at the end of the M1 academic year. They also attend lectures on relevant topics such as the Institutional Review Board, Protected Health Information, and Research Integrity.

During the second year of medical school, several hours per week are allocated for students to work on their AoSC project. Students continue to engage in regular seminars in which they formally present the progress of their projects, as well as develop the skills to critically and constructively evaluate the projects of their fellow students. Students also present their research in progress at a poster session in the fall of the second year.

M3 and M4 years:
During the third and fourth years of medical school, students spend one to three months on completion of the project and submission of an AoSC thesis. The thesis is reviewed and approved by an AoSC committee prior to graduation.

Students have opportunities to present their research findings during the annual AoSC poster presentation.