Can you speak to your exam planning for Step 1 and Step 2? Did you feel well prepared?

There is a lot of flexibility in terms of when to take Step 1 and Step 2 because of the Duke curriculum. Most med students across the country take Step 1 after their first 2 pre-clinical (classroom) years, before they start clinical rotations. At Duke we take Step 1 after our clinical rotations, during our research (3rd) year. The amount of time one takes to study is fairly flexible, and is worked out individually with your research mentor. Most people take 6 weeks to study. A few take longer and a very few take shorter. To be completely honest, I did not feel super prepared, but I did fine and passed by a wide margin, which these days is all students will need to do. I think Duke students have a leg up with regards to Step 2. Completely anecdotally, most people in my class did not take long to study and did fairly well. I assume that with Step 1 becoming pass/fail, students will begin to put more effort into step 2CK and will shine.

How have you engaged in research during your time at Duke? How have you seen your colleagues engage in research?

I really focused my research during my 3rd year. I had friends who participated in research (mostly chart reviews or data analytics for 3rd years) when they were in first year, but I think most people started serious research and gained most of their publications during third year. It is definitely valuable to get involved in research early, but with the dedicated research year, research early isn’t a necessity in most cases (this may not hold true for some competitive specialties like ortho and ophtho which like to see a lot of targeted research).

Research is also not the only thing you can do during your 3rd year! Some of my friends went on to get MBAs at the business school, to the School of Public Health both here at Duke and at UNC, and even to get a masters through the Divinity School. About 2/3 of Duke students do research on campus every year, and the other 1/3 either do research at other institutions (usually near family or significant others), or get a dual degree.

What did you do for your third year research and how have you seen this impact your career and residency options?

During my 3rd year I was still deciding between Surgery and Pediatrics, so I wanted to do research that would be applicable to both fields. I decided to do research with a pediatric surgeon who had both a surgery resident and a pediatric critical care fellow doing research in her lab. I loved my year because I was able to do bench research, clinical research, and learn hands-on from the members of her lab. She also was very helpful not only in exposing me to a diversity of experiences, but also pivoting me into projects which would result in publications when others were not working or panning out. She also wrote me a lovely letter of recommendation for residency at the end of the year, and was able to speak to my abilities in multiple different contexts.

What leadership opportunities exist at Duke Med? What leadership opportunities are integrated into the curriculum?

I think leadership is everywhere at DukeMed. I think this is in large part, if not in whole, because of the student body. People in my class have started novel student organizations, applied for and won university grants, started free clinics, and lobbied for and designed new courses which are now part of the longitudinal first year curriculum. Most people take leadership positions in various student organizations during their first and third year, since there isn’t a ton of time during second year (clinical year). There are many opportunities during 3rd year to serve as student leaders for the first and second year courses as well. Duke Med is a very active community and so I find there are opportunities to grasp leadership roles no matter what you’re interested in.