In the early fall or late spring, if you find yourself between classes enjoying the weather on Locust Walk, you might come upon a clutch of students listening to one of our best professors trying to distill a significant lesson into a one-minute talk. For six years, the School of Arts and Sciences has sponsored these 60-Second Lectures, which challenge members of our distinguished faculty to expound a big idea—from “The Knowable Universe” to “The Unknown”—in a short minute. This fun and pithy lecture series is a small but visible mark of how much we value teaching and how this fundamental mission of the School is carried out everywhere on campus—and beyond.

In the School of Arts and Sciences, we are constantly thinking and rethinking about how we can best teach our students. College dean Dennis DeTurck is fond of reminding us that “nothing goes without saying.” Earlier this year, he initiated conversations within and among departments to articulate the purpose of each of our more than 50 majors—what they teach and why they teach it. He is asking the faculty to make clear to themselves and others the goals and structure of the major, and what skills and knowledge they want students majoring in their program to take away when they graduate. This is the kind of conversation about education we relish in SAS.

Teaching doesn’t just happen in conventional classrooms or during scheduled lab periods and class times. It happens between classes in faculty offices with intense conversation over a thesis or dissertation. It happens on weekends in the working laboratories where scientists collaborate with postdoctoral fellows, graduate students and undergraduates on experiments at the frontiers of knowledge. And it happens all day long in coffee shops among students as they discuss a lecture or talk through ideas for a research project.

That teaching can also happen far from Philadelphia. Last summer, five psychology majors traveled to a tropical island to lend their talents and energies to the Mauritius Child Health Project, a longitudinal study headed by Professor Adrian Raine. After doing research by day, the group met every evening for dinner with Adrian to discuss their work on the project as well as their individual research papers. The students were inspired by this close association with a working scholar, but they also learned so much from each other, working through the Mauritius data and testing each others’ ideas.

As a dean, I could spend all my time in my College Hall office managing the School, but I chose to come to Penn in the first place because I love to teach. And so I still teach. Teaching keeps me connected to everything that matters at the heart of this institution. Every time I go into the classroom, even though I may have been teaching that subject for 25 years, it’s fresh and exciting. For freshmen engaged in learning, it’s the moment they’ve been waiting for all their lives. As a teacher, it feels that way for me too. It’s a rush, and I never want to lose that in my life or in the School of Arts and Sciences.