The theatre program I head at Schenectady College is centered on the principles and practice of the Margolis Method. In the two years I have been teaching at the college, I have seen first-hand how the practicable exercises behind the Method can make a profound difference in the lives of my students/emerging artists. It is my goal, through my teaching and creative projects at the college, to inspire my students in the same way Kari Margolis inspires those with whom she directly works: to be empowered theatre makers, to trust in the creative process, and to be the most effective storytellers imaginable. To achieve this, I strive to provide for my students a studio practice that is as close as possible to the training experience attained at the Margolis Method Center in Highland Lake, NY. It is relatively easy to create the atmosphere, an arts-lab culture similar to that found in the Highland studio, but what I find to be more of a challenge is implementing a pedagogical structure that accommodates the academic calendar while still remaining true to the Margolis training methodology.

A typical Margolis Method class session, which might last anywhere from 2 to 4 hours, involves several distinctive elements. In any given class, one might experience the following: Actor Prep (approximately 30 – 45 min.), exercise demonstration, creative research (solo, duo, and/or small group), process discussions (small and/or large group),
and the presentation of creative research (improvised and/or scripted). Of course, the amount time upon which a teacher might spend on each - or any - of these is wholly dependent on the main project, the thrust of the specific lesson for the day, as well as the length of the session itself. Generally speaking, however, most, if not all, of these essential elements are interwoven into a day’s class structure. It can be difficult enough to cover all the necessary material in a 3-hour session, let alone in 1-hour and 45 minutes.

Below I will first provide an overview as to ways I address the limited studio time.

With a spirit of flexibility and the willingness to adapt, I attempt to follow an overall schedule that not only provides students a broad experience in the Method, but also maximizes the time I have to work with them.

- Because Actor Prep is necessarily shortened in a time-limited class, it is essential to choose those specific exercises that can be directly related to the main project/theme. We understand that in the Margolis Method, “every exercise exists within every exercise,” and while the well trained teacher/actor is more effortlessly able to make connections between them, it is important for the teacher with limited time in the studio to have introduced, during Actor Prep, those concepts they can refer back to during process discussions and side-coaching.

- Despite the time crunch, I will always make room for the students to be able to discuss with each other their creative research process. This is an easy part of class to overlook, especially when the students are fully absorbed in creative work, but there is no question as to why this is such an integral part of the Method. It provides the student an opportunity to verbally articulate both their ideas and their understanding of concepts while allowing them a chance to actually use the vocabulary and actor language.

- I often alternate between weeklong projects and the self-contained class. Here is an sample month (eight classes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week One:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week Two:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause, Absorb, Effect, Transition (p.58)</td>
<td>Me, You, Us, Them pt. 1 (pg.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week Two:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week Three:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me, You, Us, Them pt. 2 (p. 48)</td>
<td>Vol./Invol. – Up/Down – Out/In (pgs. 9, 20)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week Three:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week Four:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2-3 In and Out of the Chair (p. 63)</td>
<td>Elastics and Springs pt.1 (p.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week Four:</strong></td>
<td>Elastics and Springs pt.2 (p.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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On Tuesdays (in this example, weeks 3 and 4) when we complete the first part of a project, it is important to find the right phase on which to conclude. This may or may not involve the showing of creative research. If it doesn’t, I wrap-up the class with a process discussion and I inform the students that more phases will be introduced in the Thursday class session. I tell them this to emphasize the importance of their attendance, especially if the exercise involves a duo or group. I find that some of the project in the workbook are more suitable than others for a weeklong project as opposed to a single training session. Of course, an exercise that can be completed during one class can certainly be extended across two.

After mid-term, I begin to introduce projects that take place over two-weeks of classes. For example:
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| **Week One:** | **Lesson: Conform (p.71).** (Class concludes with actors showing scripts they have created.)  
*On this day, my actor prep might be a slightly longer and more demanding, while still leaving ample time for research.* | **Lesson: Contrast (p.71).** (Class concludes with actors showing scripts with both conforming and contrasting). I assign “homework,” asking the student to find a space in their current scripts where they break out of the straight hallway and add at least one round interspatial acting beat.  
*On this day, my actor prep, again, might be longer and more demanding, while still leaving time for research.* |
| **Week Two:** | **On this day, my actor prep is more limited in length in order to give myself ample time to guide them through new phases.**  
*After providing them a little time to review their scripts they worked on over the weekend, I introduce two new phases:*  
1. I give them a book as a prop, asking them incorporate it into their scripts, taking into consideration its qualities and specificity of purpose. (See “Actor to Object” writing on page 154 for thoughts on the actor’s relationship to objects.)  
2. After some research, I ask them to create a line of text and incorporate it into their scripts (justifying speaking on the action or in transitions)  
*We don’t present at the end of this class, but have a substantive process discussion. Their homework is to practice their scripts with the book and text. I tell them that we may show for a grade on Thurs.* | **On this day, my actor prep might be even more limited in length, giving them time to work through the final phase and prepare their research for showing.**  
*After providing them a few minutes to review their scripts, I have each student present their work, saving discussion until the entire group has shown. After this, I shake it up by introducing a final phase. They are to partner up with another actor and create a new story based on the combination of their scripts.*  
*Adding a “workshop” day like this allows the students to immerse themselves in the creative process while meeting the challenges of the added final phase.*  
*I leave ample time at the end to show and discuss.* |

Five days pass between the last class of one week and the first of the next (if on a M/W or a T/TH schedule). In order to help bridge this gap and keep forward momentum throughout the
semester, I almost always assign some sort of homework for the weekend: either a creative project of some kind (building stories/script building) or a discussion question exercise.

Homework assignments that involve creative projects depend on which concepts we are researching at that time and where we are in the process. Sometimes, I ask my students to practice and refine a script already in progress, and other times I assign a new, prescribed structure for them to come back with and show the following week. This keeps the student active and engaged outside the studio.

I have also found it incredibly useful to utilize the online discussion forum offered as part of the College’s course management software. I have created a series of questions/prompts, one of which I assign to the student approximately every other week. The discussion board becomes open for submissions on Thursday night and closes on the following Monday afternoon. For full credit, students are expected to provide one initial post and respond to at least two of their peers. Each of their posts should clearly demonstrate a thorough understanding of the topic. I require detailed responses substantiated by examples from class. Sample discussion prompts include:

• Explain the concept: “Every exercise exists in every exercise.”
• What does Kari Margolis mean when she states that “our job [as actors] is to make the incremental, profound”?
• “A character is a set of limitations.” Explain this and provide an example.
• Kari Margolis once said, “We are not defining what the esoteric practice of acting is – but what it is to be an actor.” What does she mean and what might this say about actor training in the US?
• Explain the concept: “Honesty Reigns.”
• What does Kari Margolis mean when she claims that “every character is a transposition of what is universal”?
• “Minimum amount of effort for maximum amount of story.” Explain this and provide an example.

Discussion forums allow the student to dig deeper into the work and make-up for some of the lost discussion time in truncated classes.

As teachers, we recognize that some of our students intersect with the research from a more intellectual, structured approach while others tend to utilize a more instinctual, organic approach. Kari has often explained this though the theory of Hemisphericity or the individual difference in the preference to use the left or the right hemispheric mode of processing information. Assigning homework that focuses on either creative work or concept analysis forces the student to draw from both the left-brain and the right-brain. It acknowledges the presence of balance, and synthesizes the intellectual and creative ways of thinking. At the same time, if this homework is assigned on the last class of the week it can help to bridge the divide between training sessions.

Since students process information in different ways and at different rates, the Method addresses this notion through the theory of “spiral learning,” which has two definitions.
One definition, put simply, is the introduction of a topic, touching on it for a brief time and then moving on to another. The idea is that a topic isn’t fully investigated nor learned the first time around and, subsequently, the student can pick up more information when the subject is revisited. With each training session, the student will expand on their skill-set and build new understanding. The notion here is that brief exposure to a topic, and then later reexamining it, allows the student to construct their own understanding on a basic framework. This is inherent in the way Margolis Method concepts and exercises are taught.

The second explanation of the term, the one I find more difficult to manifest in class, is the theory that the breadth and depth of a student’s learning advances when they are working and training side-by-side with others who have differing levels of experience, and/or abilities, expectations, needs. This type of multilevel training provides opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills as they interact with each other. Through watching, working with and listening to more experienced students, those with less experience in the Method learn from the wider knowledge base of their more experienced peers by the modeling of skills and performance. On the other hand, students with extensive experience in the Method likewise develop their capabilities as they assume leadership roles in the studio, sharing their knowledge while articulating, clarifying, and manifesting concepts and technique on a deeper level. This type of training allows for continuous progress.

Because students who enter a Margolis Method class in an academic setting are, essentially, beginning the work at the same time and on the same tier of the learning spiral, it makes it quite challenging to fashion a multilevel learning environment. I have yet to completely solve this issue, but I often allow my students who have already taken the class, to simply show-up and participate, just as long as they agree to attend regularly and are willing to complete all the work. Many of my students plan their class/work schedules so they will have time to participate in the training. This has been incredibly useful for me as an instructor to have someone on-hand to help demonstrate concepts and exercises. It is beneficial to all the students, too, for reasons mentioned above. Unfortunately, most colleges have Course Repeat Policies that do not allow students to take a course more than once (if they earned a grade of a C or higher).

The university system is chock-full of rules, regulations, and red tape and can often serve as the antithesis to art. The acting studio is not immune. With limited time allotted to studio classes, especially in liberal art schools, it can be extraordinarily challenging for the Margolis Method acting teacher to create a curriculum that fully embraces the methodology while working within the constraints of an academic calendar and curriculum structure. My charge is to find a way to create both a learning environment and, thus, an experience for my students that resembles, as closely as possible, that which can be found at the training center in Highland Lake, NY. As a Margolis Method teacher, I have the opportunity to assist my students in finding their own creative potential and becoming dynamic, expressive and compelling storytellers. As I continue to work on my own skill-sets, I am eager to further investigate how these tools and skills can be passed on to young artists/scholars in the academic setting.