Lesson Systems Committee Task:
The CALLERLAB Lesson Systems Committee is charged with gathering and reporting on the different variations of teaching Mainstream lessons to new dancers. These various systems will be highlighted in a brochure which will be made available to callers and dancer organizations. The hope is that we will increase the number of new dancers entering our activity by giving them a successful and entertaining way to learn how to square dance.

Assumptions of this White Paper:
This White Paper is written as a guide to identify the different systems used for teaching the Mainstream Square Dance Program to new dancers. We will update it as new lesson systems are tried and documented.

This Committee is not charged with analyzing the various teaching methods or style used to teach calls. We recognize that there are many successful teaching methods used to teach the various square dance calls in the Mainstream Program. These have been documented by many excellent folks and in many other papers in CALLERLAB.

Our focus is to document the different ways that are being used to present the calls. We are studying ways that we can present them to groups of new dancers to allow them to learn the calls and be proficient enough to dance the Mainstream Program at any club or festival dance. The objective is to teach the calls in an order that makes it possible for the new dancers to learn how to dance, and to keep them motivated to finish the lessons and learn all the calls in the Mainstream Program.

It is generally accepted that dancers have the most success and are able to reach a good proficiency of Mainstream Program dancing if the caller presents and teaches the calls from their “standard application” positions. Dancers should be able to attend most Mainstream Program dances if they know all the calls from the standard positions. We will not argue against the feeling that they will be “better” dancers if they are taught the calls from all the positions. Certainly that is true. However, we want them to become interested in dancing and continue to pursue it in the shortest possible time. Success is measured by how long they keep dancing after we have presented them their lessons.
Lesson Systems Identified to Date:

**Traditional Method**

The Traditional System has been in use for many years. New dancers with no exposure to square dancing have come to learn all the calls necessary for the Basic and Mainstream Program levels. The new dancers are taught the calls in a thorough methodical process, usually on a weekly basis. The lessons begin in September and continue through April. Dancers are asked to meet each week for 2 hours. CALLERLAB described the calls, developed a recommended teaching order and, more importantly, a recommended teaching time (40-60 hours) to teach an entire set of lessons at the Mainstream level.

The caller states the name of the call, walks the dancers through it, and practices it with music until he/she is satisfied with their understanding. Usually, the call is taught and practiced from various formations to make more well-rounded dancers. Standard application positions are presented. This process continues until the dancers are able to execute all of the calls within the Program.

Clubs run one set of lessons each year. They recruit the students and then work with them for the entire lesson period. The students are then “graduated” into that Program level and encouraged to continue dancing in the square dance community with their club and/or other clubs.

The system is very effective for those willing to devote the time necessary to complete the lessons. They may even become better dancers because of the extended floor time in a learning environment. The downside is that if clubs put all their efforts into one prime recruiting month, they may lose the opportunity to add more dancers during other times of the year.

**Multi-Cycle Lessons**

Multi-cycle lessons divide the teaching into two 12+12 week sessions or 17+17 week sessions. New dancers are taught the first half of the moves in Phase I. Then, if they wish, they can continue to the completion of the lessons in Phase II. If they wish, they can retake Phase I before progressing to Phase II. The club will recruit and start-up a new “cycle” of lessons after Phase I.

Usually, a three hour evening of teaching is split into two 1.5 hour sessions. Phase I is for beginners. The Phase II session is for those continuing on to the full Mainstream. The Phase II dancers are encouraged to come early and “Angel” (assist) the new dancers who are just starting the Phase I cycle.

All dancers in Phase II are also invited to attend club dances where they are encouraged to dance every other tip. By doing so, they have received the benefit of socializing with the club members, learning the new moves in their Phase II session, and reviewing what they learned in their Phase I session.
Currently, the Mainstream Program requires 34 weeks of instruction. However, the time required before starting a new class of dancers is cut down to 12 or 17 weeks. The club can be recruiting and starting new dancers in a shorter timeframe. They can also integrate them into the club quicker by adjusting their regular club dance schedule.

**Accelerated Lessons**

Lesson acceleration is possible if you have capable dancers. These are known as Accelerated, Blast or Fast-Track lessons. There are many variations of this teaching program. The concept is that teaching is compressed into three or four sessions. Typically, these are presented on consecutive Saturdays during a six hour timeframe. Club members usually provide a lunch break and, of course, help as “Angels”. This promotes the “fun and friendship” aspect of square dancing. The caller will work through the calls at an accelerated pace, teaching three hours before and after lunch.

Good workshop follow-up teaching is vital to the success of new dancers as they integrate into a club. The caller must reinforce what they have learned, and workshop as necessary to ensure their confidence. The club members must also encourage the new dancers as they complete their understanding of how to dance, and must work with them to reinforce what was presented in the accelerated sessions. In some cases, if there are enough new dancers in the area, dances can be held just for those new dancers. It is a very successful way to reinforce what they’ve learned.

Compression of the time spent on the lessons can be even more dramatic if you have dancers who can handle the intensity of the material presented, both physically and mentally. Clubs have compressed the Mainstream Program into a “Boot Camp” style weekend. The sessions begin on Friday for usually four hours, followed by a six or eight hour session on Saturday and Sunday. The entire set of Mainstream Program calls is presented. The new dancers are then invited into the club where workshop tips are held to strengthen areas that they feel are weak. Typically, this type of session works best on the college campus or in a teen youth group.

**Conclusion**

Clubs and callers that are resourceful will use a combination of Traditional, Multi-Cycle and Accelerated lesson scheduling that best fits the new dancers they have recruited. Every time that you recruit these dancers and begin teaching them our dance, their potential must be evaluated in order to set up a group of sessions that will teach them the calls they need to dance a specific program. Tailor it to the group in a way that will keep the new dancers motivated to complete all the
sessions. Make the evenings fun and avoid making it seem like work to them. Make it seem that they are coming to a dance every evening instead of to school!

The Lessons System Committee and CALLERLAB are interested in any systems that you have developed, tested and found successful. Please share your story with us at www.CALLERLAB.org. The Home Office will pass it along to us to include in this paper. We would like to document any ideas that you may be experimenting with. Our Committee will collect these stories and publish them so that others can try them in their area. Together, we can help the square dance activity continue to prosper. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me by e-mail at: agladson@austin.rr.com or by phone at: (512) 219-9258.