**Online Teaching Showcase 2014**

**Title of Presentation:** From CATS to WILD HOGS: Elevating the Level of Discussion in the Online Classroom

**Presentation Abstract:**

Online teaching is growing at a rapid pace. To meet the increasing demand of online education, many courses have been designed to enable the instructor to be more of a facilitator rather than an active participant in the classroom space (Ragan, n.d.). However, building an active, student-centered learning environment in online classes is needed to prevent instructors from becoming stagnant and to motivate and inspire them to take on a variety of roles as the students’ “guide, facilitator, and teacher” (Ragan, n.d., p. 6). One important component of becoming a “guide, facilitator, and teacher” (Ragan, n.d., p. 6) is to hone effective questioning skills and activities in the discussion forums.

**Gauging Student Learning Through CATs**

Instructors can useAngelo and Cross’s (1993) concept of CATs to embed on-the-spot activities into the classroom that illuminate possible areas for growth or greater understanding. The use of formative assessment is beneficial in the online classroom because it serves as a quick check for understanding that will proactively guide lessons or discussions based on the needs of the class/students and allows faculty to gauge where the class is at as a whole.

One of the integral components of using CATs is that instructors can constantly change or improve the activities to better meet the needs of each group of student learners (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Cross, 1987). This is particularly important in the online classroom where both traditional and non-traditional students are present and various learning styles and backgrounds come into play. As Angelo and Cross (1993) have made clear, it is important to close the loop of the teaching and learning cycle by continually providing feedback that improves student learning outcomes.

**Expanding Thinking Using “Higher Order Genius”**

 While CATs are a useful technique in the online classroom, it is important to go beyond taking the temperature of students’ understanding of a concept. Instructors must move students’ thinking to the next level by asking higher order questions or questions that are “Written Intentionally for Learning Depth and Higher Order Genius” or WILD HOGs (Johnson, 2014). WILD HOGs are engaging questions that address course content and reach the upper echelon of Bloom’s Taxonomy, including synthesis and evaluation.

**From CATs to WILD HOGs**

 Through the use of higher order questioning techniques, online instructors can take the information gathered through CATs and then invite students to effectively problem solve and discuss questions that allow them to learn key course concepts. It is only when we combine CATs with HOGs that we can fully analyze student learning and then ask probing questions that ensure student learning.