In order to best explain how I address diversity in the classroom, I will here focus on my work at Wright College over the past three years. Based on my experiences teaching at a number of institutions, I expect students in my classroom to be diverse in many ways. My work at Wright College provides the best example of how I approach teaching a diverse range of students.

Until I began teaching at Wright College, I had not experienced much diversity in the classroom. My undergraduate and graduate institutions both had very homogenous student bodies. Wright College, on the other hand, gas a very diverse student body and when I began teaching at Wright, I changed a number of my policies and readings to reflect the student body that I was serving. For instance, all of my students commuted to campus and many had full-time jobs. In order to respond to the economic situation that some of my students were in, as well as contend with the practicality of public transportation delays, I changed my attendance policy for my courses. I kept attendance and participation as a part of the grade, but I allowed students as many absences as they needed. For example, I had one student whose work schedule changed, and she was no longer able to make it to class at all. Nonetheless she constantly communicated with me and put in all the work, eventually succeeding in my class. I changed these policies to best serve my students as I recognized their various needs. Promoting a diverse classroom starts with class policies that realize the needs of the students.

I also recognize that the philosophical canon has historically been dominated by white men and have worked to make sure that the texts read in my class represent the diverse voices that we have in philosophy. For instance, in my Intro class instead of having my students read Descartes on the mind-body problem as I once did, I now have them read the correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia. I added a section on Aztec moral philosophy to my Ethics class, and my Intro class features writers from Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America. Recognizing the philosophical approaches of those groups that the Western canon has historically ignored enriches our understanding of philosophy and thus I bring in a myriad of different voices into my classes. While at Wright College, I helped edit some of the Master Syllabi that our department uses and in doing so helped to diversify the suggested course readings. For instance, on our Master Syllabus for Social and Political Philosophy I changed some readings from John Locke on property rights to Native American approaches to property rights in view of colonialism.

Beyond my class design, I make sure that a diverse range of voices are heard in my classrooms. I use certain exercises in class to make sure that certain students don’t dominate the conversation. For instance, in my Intro class, while covering the problem of evil, I ask my students to spend a few minutes considering what evil is and writing down their thoughts. I then collect these writings and will select a few at random to anonymously read. I’ll also have students work on problems that we are discussing, for instance whether or not we can have free will in a deterministic universe, in small groups and have each group report out their thoughts to the class. These types of activities give all students the opportunity to share their thoughts and encourage sharing from those who might typically have their voices drowned out by a few more dominant students.

Our student body is diverse in many ways beyond what is visible, and I work to address this. I structure and organize my classes with policies that take into account the diversity of my students. I choose readings so that a wide range of philosophical voices are heard, and within the classroom I also work to make sure that a diverse range of students are able to share their thoughts. These efforts ensure that I am able to best serve my student body.