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11/30/2007

### Zachary Wissner-Gross wins Hertz Fellowship

**LIVERMORE, Calif. – November 21, 2007** – Great Neck native and future physicist Zachary Wissner-Gross has started his academic research career on a high note. The 22-year-old former professional opera singer recently won a full five-year graduate fellowship from the prestigious Fannie and John Hertz Foundation to pursue PhD studies in physics, specifically biophysics, at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

“I would like to apply my background in the physical sciences toward innovating tissue engineering and other techniques of regenerative medicine,” Wissner-Gross says. “I am particularly interested in studying neural tissue. I hope my research into nerve regeneration will one day be helpful to patients with paralysis or neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s.”

Wissner-Gross is one of 15 graduate students selected from more than 580 across the country to receive the Hertz graduate fellowship. Hertz Fellows each receive up to \$240,000 over five years to pursue their own scientific interests at top universities in the United States. This no-strings-attached support gives Hertz Fellows financial independence and freedom to conduct innovative research because, unlike many other grants, university and study choices are not limited by strict funding requirements.

“Hertz Fellows represent the very best young scientific talent in our nation,” says John Holzrichter, PhD, Hertz Foundation president. “These students

### UPCOMING DEADLINES

8/31/2007  
 New Hertz Application for 2008-2009 Academic Year now available online, [CLICK HERE](#)

11/2/2007  
 Hertz Application Deadline November 2, 2007

11/5/2007  
 Reference Reports due by November 5, 2007

embody the drive and curiosity to solve the most difficult problems our world faces, and we are pleased to support them as they grow in their chosen disciplines.”

Wissner-Gross spent much of his childhood performing with the New York City Opera, including major roles in Mozart’s “The Magic Flute,” Menotti’s “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” and Britten’s “The Turn of the Screw.” Of the latter performance, renowned music critic Peter G. Davis wrote in *New York Magazine*: “Over the years, I’ve seen more than a dozen boy sopranos ... none better than Zachary Wissner-Gross, whose sweet treble and angelic appearance are matched by remarkable vocal assurance and stage savvy.”

Aspiring to one day become a university professor, Wissner-Gross already has an abundance of research experience, including work in tissue engineering, cryobiology, stem cell identification, computational neurology, and the detection of trace particles via mass spectrometry. He would ultimately like to design a system that rapidly fabricates functional tissue and organs in vitro. Wissner-Gross has also taught several courses to high school students while an undergraduate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology through the Research Science Institute, MIT ACCESS and the MIT Educational Studies Program.

When he is not in the laboratory, Wissner-Gross may be found on the stage, performing in musicals, or competing in table tennis tournaments. He co-founded “Chicken Tennis,” a recreational tennis club at MIT, and served as captain for an intramural softball team. Wissner-Gross is also a writer. He placed second in a recent MIT science fiction writing contest and served as editor of *Counterpoint*, an MIT-Wellesley publication about student life.

Wissner-Gross graduated in 2003 from Great Neck South High School, Great Neck, N.Y., where he was a National Merit Scholar. He received a number of honors while in high school, including winning the “First Step to the Nobel Prize in Physics” contest for modeling the membrane potentials of interacting neurons. This work also led to the prizes from the American Academy of Neurology and the Intel Science Talent Search.

He double majored in physics and

biology at MIT, where he graduated in 2007. Upon graduation, he received the Orloff Award for Service to MIT Physics, and was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Pi Sigma Honors Societies. In addition to the Hertz Fellowship, Wissner-Gross was awarded the U.S. Department of Defense NDSEG Fellowship and the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. He previously received the Department of Homeland Security Undergraduate Scholarship and the NIH-MIT Research Fellowship in Macromolecular Interactions.

Wissner-Gross's father, Sigmund Wissner-Gross, is an attorney at Brown Rudnick, and his mother, Elizabeth Wissner-Gross, is a writer and educational consultant. Wissner-Gross's brother, Alexander, 25, is completing graduate studies in physics at Harvard and is also a Hertz Fellow. Zachary and Alexander are only the fourth pair of siblings to receive the Hertz Fellowship in the history of the Hertz Foundation.

#### **About the Hertz Foundation**

The Fannie and John Hertz Foundation, based in Livermore, Calif., is a tax exempt, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the selection and support of outstanding individuals in the applied physical, biological and engineering sciences. Founded in 1963, the Foundation's mission is to build America's capacity for innovation by nurturing remarkable applied scientists and engineers who show the most promise to change the world. It awards fellowships to an average of 15 PhD candidates every year to pursue graduate studies at the nation's finest academic institutions. As a result, the Hertz Foundation supports the research efforts of about 75 Fellows at any given time. The Hertz Fellowships are widely considered to be among the most competitive and most prestigious offered anywhere. For more information about the Fannie and John Hertz Foundation, as well as giving opportunities, go to [www.hertzfoundation.org](http://www.hertzfoundation.org).

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