

Public opinion polls help to plan election strategies

By Ann Harrell

The UNL political science department kicked off its annual series of brown-bag lectures Friday with a presentation on political use of public opinion polls.

Harrison Hickman, vice president of Hamilton and Associates, a Washington political consulting firm, talked about the use of polls to plan political campaigns.

Hickman used videotaped political commercials and actual polls taken by his firm to outline the development that certain political strategies take. He focused primarily on the 1982 campaigns of Nebraska Gov. Bob Kerrey and Kansas Gov. John Carlin.

Hickman showed the Kerrey commercials, pointing out strategic angles taken as a direct result of polling. When early surveys reported Kerrey was relatively unknown in Nebraska, commercials emphasized his life story. Poll results indicated former Gov. Charles Thone was vulnerable on the issue of the state's fiscal problems. Kerrey commercials then targeted Kerrey's abilities as a businessman. However, his ownership of Grandmother's Skillet restaurants was given little emphasis.

"People responded better to the idea that Kerrey had a business success story than that he had a restaurant," explained Hickman.

Hickman began working for Kerrey in February 1982. He said he spoke frequently to people running Kerrey's campaign. In September and October, the contact was almost daily, he said. Since Kerrey's election however, communication has dropped, he said.

"I speak with him occasionally, but I don't run governments," Hickman said. "I help people get elected. I wouldn't try to control anyone as to what he or she does as governor."

Hickman said not all the news he delivers to his clients is good and isn't intended to be.

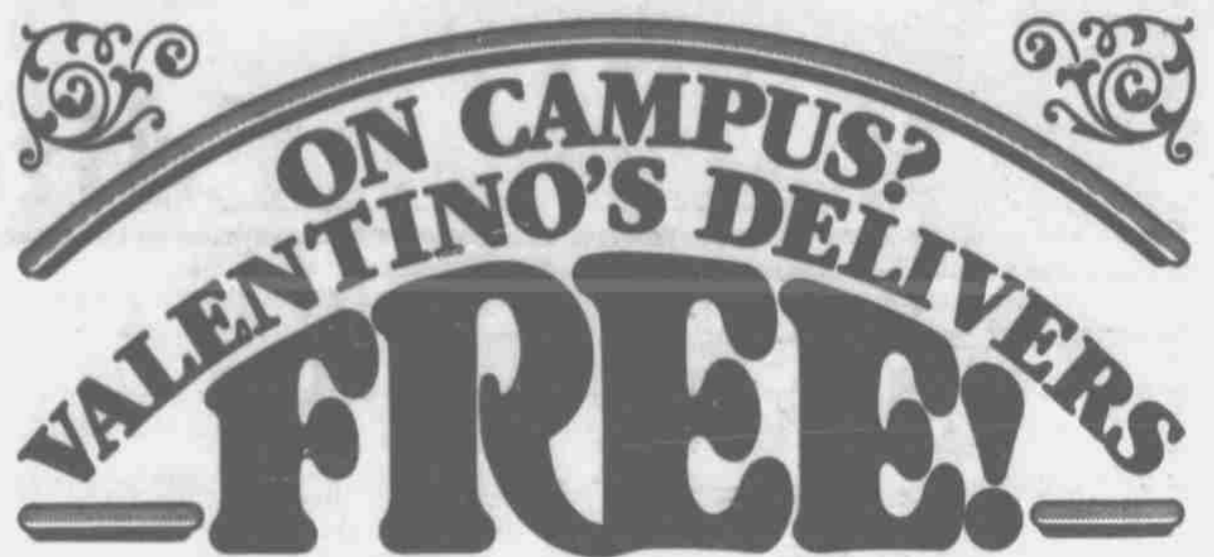
"We provide timely, objective information for people who are planning political campaigns," he said.

He frequently advises candidates to give up on the idea of running for office — based on public opinion poll results.

"They pay us to tell them what the truth is," Hickman said.

"We become a circuit between the voters and the campaign."

Hickman, who received his master's from UNL, will help develop campaign strategies for U.S. Sen. John Glenn's presidential campaign.



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