

International political campaign manager advises COMBA majors

by Jenny Zhang
staff writer

Harry Walter, a public relations consultant and political campaign manager from Germany, came to Behrend to speak to communications students and faculty on March 29. Walter spoke of many issues that he has problems with in today's PR arena, including his idea that politicians today perceive themselves as intellectuals, causing them to become disconnected from the voters.

Walter was the guest speaker of Dr. Ursula Davis, assistant professor of communication. He has managed more than 80 political campaigns in Germany, Austria, Portugal, and many other countries. Several of these campaigns were successful presidential runs. He is the owner and president of ISAP Institute, ARE-Kommunikation, and a past president of International Association of Political Campaigns (IAPC).

With more than 40 years of experience in political campaigns, Walter related his expertise to the students.

"Political campaigning is like fishing: the worm must taste good to the fish, not necessarily the man [fishing]." Walter explained that PR consultants want to promote what will appeal to the buyer, though it may not appeal to the promoter. Walter believes that good politicians must reach out to the public by interacting with voters and gaining an insight to their perspective. Then a campaign that will target the voters can be constructed. Politicians should represent the people's

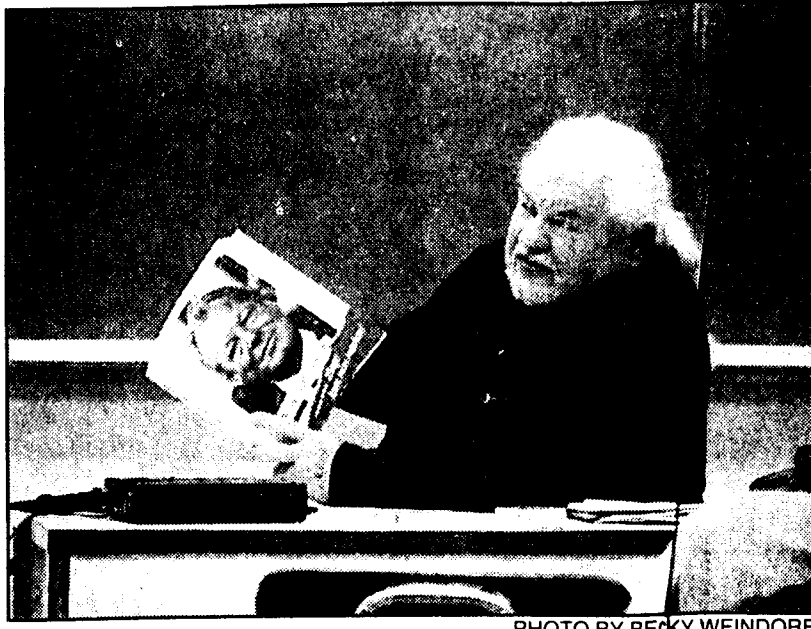


PHOTO BY BECKY WEINDORF

Harry Walter, an international political campaign manager, visited Dr. Ursula Davis' public relations class and spoke with Communications students and faculty on March 29.

viewpoints. According to Walter, in Germany one of the main fallacies of political campaigns is that politicians are unable to communicate their high ideals so that normal people can understand.

"Too many 'eggheads' end up with leadership positions. Once they win the position, they become selfish and fail to think of what people want," Walter said.

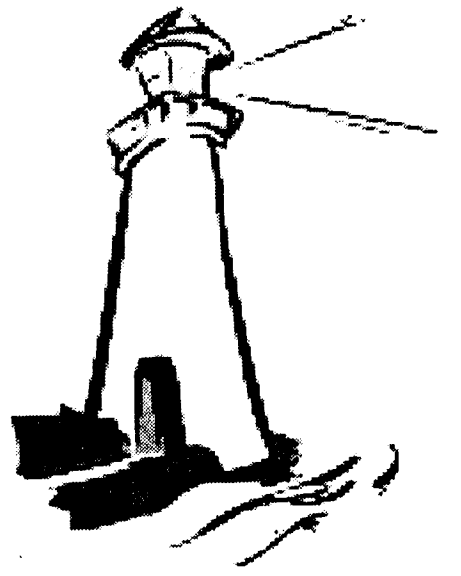
Walter pointed out that one of the key components of successful political campaigning is the understanding of semantics, or the understanding of the connotations and effects of words. For example, the word "China" would conjure the image of a country for some people, while others might associate the China with the Communist Party or

the Red Scare era. During campaigning, one must be aware of the sensitivity of words and negative connotations some words may portray, Walter said.

Through the years Walter has won eight presidential campaigns: Willy Brandt, chancellor of Germany in 1969 and 1972; Bruno Kreisky, chancellor of Austria in 1970 and 1971; Helmut Schmidt, chancellor of Germany in 1976 and 1980; Luis Alberto Monge, president of Costa Rica in 1982; Mario Soares, prime minister of Portugal in 1976, 1980, and 1983 and president of Portugal in 1986. He also assisted Teddy Kolek in 1981 and 1983 and Shimon Peres in 1984 in becoming the mayor of Jerusalem. Walter also prepared "Action NO" against General Pinochet of Chile in 1986.

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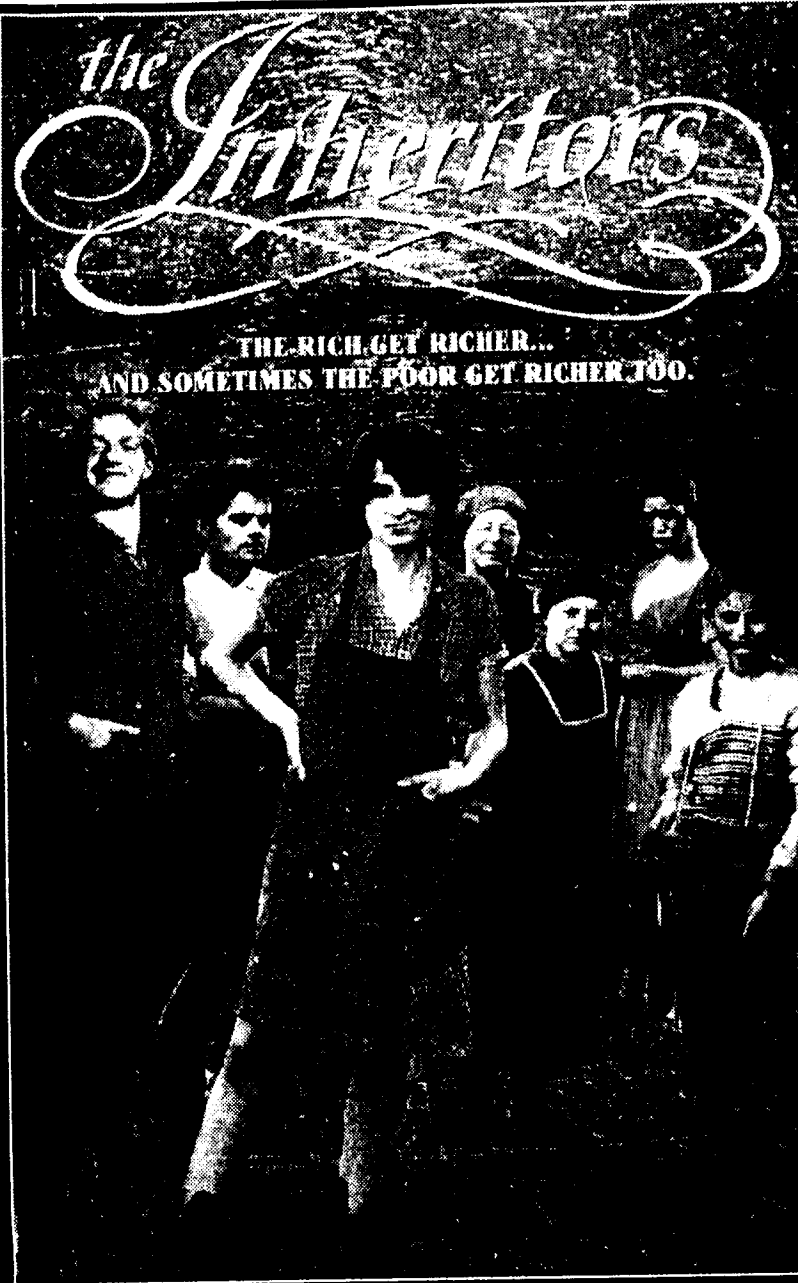
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