

Caesar's Wife Needs to Clean Up Her Act

It was a terrible scandal. Pompeia, wife of Julius Caesar and cousin to Pompey the Great, had hosted the religious ceremony of the Good Goddess in her home. No men were allowed to attend this ritual, but one, rumored to be Pompeia's lover, had managed to sneak in.

Caesar was one of Rome's six Praetors at the time, an elected public office, and a very likely candidate for consul in two years. There was no proof that Pompeia had been involved in perpetrating the sacrilege, but Caesar divorced her anyway. "Caesar's wife," he said, "must be above suspicion."

Now maybe Caesar was actually doing the right thing, or maybe he was just being politically expedient. But he clearly had a point. If you're going to be involved in public life, and deserve the public's faith and trust in you, your actions must be more than merely justifiable. They must be beyond even the shadow of a doubt. And that holds not just for public officials, but for public institutions as well.

Which is why I find my University's ongoing relationship with U.S. Bank troubling. Maybe, just maybe, this University's willingness to sell access to our students is just a way to provide them with a convenient banking service. Maybe, just maybe, her advertising U.S. Bank's loans and checking accounts to our incoming freshmen is just to ease their transition into college life. Maybe, just maybe, the relationship is justifiable. But I have my doubts, and I bet you do too. So Caesar's wife is not exactly keeping herself above suspicion.

I know these doubts are widely shared within the University herself. When the tie with U.S. Bank was first announced, I think 3 or 4 years ago, there were a lot of faculty members who spoke out against it. Unfortunately, under UW System rules, this is a budget issue, and faculty have no say in budget issues. Our only option was to boycott the new University ID cards with U.S. Bank magnetic strips attached to them. Many of us still patiently carry our old, pre-U.S. Bank IDs.

So what is Caesar's wife selling her reputation for? A \$30,000 "signing bonus," plus \$15,000 a year. According to Tom Sonnleitner, Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, that money goes for a campus information office, and funds student scholarships and academic programs. Now, \$15,000 might pay for one Ad-Hoc Academic Staff person teaching a course or two every semester, but you can't buy very much academic programming for \$15,000 a year. UW Oshkosh's total annual budget is over \$150,000,000 a year. \$15,000 a year barely covers the cost of toilet paper.

Personally, I don't think Caesar's wife is getting a very good price on her good name. Yes, as Chancellor Wells says, the University needs to "pursue ethical ways to diversify our revenues." But we should be doing that by building upon our reputation as a high quality educational institution, not by selling our 18 year old freshmen to the highest bidder.

By advertising our Nursing and MBA programs, our successes in student research, and our graduates' scores on their professional exams, not by advertising the availability of U.S. Bank ATM machines. By pulling in more financial support from our many successful alumni here in the Fox Valley, not by pushing our current undergraduates into a banking option not necessarily in their own best interest. By practicing the Business Ethics that we teach.

If you feel the same way I do, please, as the University's "external constituents," let our Chancellor and Vice Chancellor know. Please tell them how you think Caesar's wife should comport herself.