Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

STEPHEN CHAPCO

BA (University of Regina, 2011)

“Traitors, Harlots and Monsters: The Anti-Aristocratic Caricatures of the French Revolution”

Department of History

Wednesday, August 19, 2015
10:00AM
Clearihue Building
Room B215

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jill Walshaw, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Rob Alexander, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, Department of French, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Gary Kuchar, Department of English, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The opening of the Estates General in 1789 came at a time of momentous national crisis. France’s separate Three Estates were summoned to meet and collectively decide about how best to remedy France’s many ills. However, the initial collegial spirit between the privileged Estates and the assertive Third Estate quickly evaporated. Antipathy towards certain nobles, particularly those perceived as corrupt and debauched, had a long history in France, quickly crystalizing in 1789 into hostile attacks on the entire Second Estate, who were all labeled dangerous “aristocrats”. The rapid disempowerment of one of Europe’s strongest élites is difficult to interpret without discussing the important role of widely produced anti-noble caricatures that befell France’s nobility.

Anti-noble caricatures, ranging from the malicious to the comical, were an essential component in the rapid sidelining and demonization of the nobility. From approximately 1789-1793 anti-noble caricatures constantly degraded and demonized their targets, in unrelenting and accessible imagery, marking them out as traitorous enemies. Caricatures not only helped convince the public that nobles were inhuman, but so dangerous in fact, that persecution and violence became options in order to purge France of its alleged aristocratic fifth columnists.