



# PhD training program Research School Political History

## Module 7

### Science Outreach, Communication and Applied History

**Date:** 8 May 2026 | **Time:** 14:00 – 17:00

**Location:** Utrecht University, Janskerkhof 2-3, zaal 111

**Credits:** 1 ECTS

**Registration deadline:** 24 April 2026, please register by sending an email to:

[bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl](mailto:bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl)

**Submit assignment by:** 1 May 2026, via:

[bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl](mailto:bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl)

#### Speakers

Prof. Dr. Beatrice de Graaf – Utrecht University

Prof. Dr. Harm Kaal – Radboud University

*Please find the full program and course description below*

## Course description

In this module, you will consider the relevance of your work in relation to current affairs and broader societal debates, focusing in particular on the 'big question' that your research seeks to address. You will also explore how methods of 'applied history' can be developed, and how your research might function as 'usable history' for audiences beyond academia, such as professionals working in policy-making, heritage institutions, the press, or think tanks. In this context, you will think about how you can present your academic skills and knowledge to a wider audience and how these competencies may be relevant for your career beyond the PhD and outside the university. Finally, the module invites you to consider your own role as historians in the public sphere and the potential responsibilities and opportunities associated with engaging with audiences beyond academia.

## Assignment

Please include your name, title and a short description of your project in the assignments; also indicate the stage in which your PhD project currently is.

1. The current climate of polarized public debate prompts a reflection on how you, as a historian, want to position yourself in this, being informed by academic (historical) knowledge and skills. A historian's presence in the public sphere might be subsumed under a range of "registers" or "personae". One can take an activist, political and critical stance based on one's expertise, stick to a more reflective scholarly persona stressing one's role as an academic historian, become actively involved in commissioned research and related policy discussions or reach out to the broader public by popularizing historical research. Which of these (or other) registers or personae would you prefer and why?

In all of these cases academic historians find themselves in a context in which they have to negotiate and/or cross the boundaries between "academia" and "the world beyond". Which risks are involved in taking a more public role (by engaging with public debate in (digital) media, be it by writing op-ed, by joining a policy council or publishing a popular article, among others) and how do you see yourself dealing with those risks?

**Write a short statement (no more than 1 A4)** in preparation for the discussions during the seminar in which you reflect on these questions. For inspiration, you could browse through the social media timelines/ substacks etc. of historians like Mary Beard, Niall Ferguson, Leo Lucassen, Beatrice de Graaf, Karwan Fatah-Black, Geerten Waling, Olivette Otele, Anton Jäger, Henry Rousso, Simon

Schama, Timothy Snyder, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Barbara Engelking, Samuel Moyn and many more.

2. In Belgium and the Netherlands applied history (finally) seems to be finding its momentum. Applied history is a key element in the [Adapt!](#) Research project hosted by the UU and in the Netherlands historians across Dutch universities supported an 'applied history manifesto' (in [Dutch](#)) published in NRC-Handelsblad in May 2020. In 2019, Dutch historians launched an academic journal dedicated to applied history published by [Brill](#). Historians in the Low Countries are drawing inspiration from examples in the USA and Britain, among others. In the USA the [Belfer Center](#) at Harvard University is leading the way (Allison & Ferguson, 2016), in Britain back in 2002 Cambridge historians founded the [historyandpolicy.org](#) platform. Moreover, academic historians have become accustomed to writing 'knowledge utilisation paragraphs' as part of their applications for NWO and FWO funding. Assignment: Browse through these webpages and **think about** how to position yourself in this context and make the case for the added value of the skills, knowledge and insights you, as a historian and expert, bring to the table.
3. Based on the reading for this seminar, we ask you to **write a short paper** (800-1000 words) in which you discuss the following questions.
  - a. How could I bring the results of my historical research to bear on contemporary problems and challenges?
  - b. Who would my target audience/public be and how could I reach them?
  - c. Which skills, knowledge and insights do I as a historian bring in?
  - d. And how do I convince others of the value of these skills, knowledge insights?
  - e. In what terms can I best articulate the societal impact of my findings (e.g. knowledge application, contribute (contextual) understanding, provide a new perspective)?

### **Reading**

- Graham Allison & Niall Ferguson (2016), *Applied history manifesto*: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/applied-history-manifesto>
- Harm Kaal, Hoe merk je aan mij dat ik een historicus ben? Oratie Radboud Universiteit, mei 2025, <https://books.radbouduniversitypress.nl/index.php/rup/catalog/book/Hoe-merk-je>
- Yannick Balk, Georg Frerks & Beatrice de Graaf (2022), 'Investigating Historical Abuses, Journal of Applied History' (published online ahead of print 2022). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10020>

*In Dutch:*

- See also this forum, with a range of fascinating contributions to the Applied History manifesto that was launched in the NRC Handelsblad, <https://www.historici.nl/manifest-pas-toe-doe-mee-applied-history-in-theorie-en-praktijk/>

*For further reading:*

- Violet Soen & Bram De Ridder (2021), 'Applied History in the Netherlands and Flanders: Synergising Practices in Education, Research, and Society', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 136(4), 27–57. <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.7117>
- Robert Crowcroft (2018), 'The Case for Applied History. Can the study of the past really help us to understand the present?', *History Today* 68:9 <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/case-applied-history>
- J. Guldi & D. Armitage (2014), 'Introduction'. In: Guldi & Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1-13, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/history-manifesto/introduction/2BoF7EA5D852C49CB8B9838123B67B12>