



Photo Credit: Chris Schiffner ([CC BY-NC 3.0 US](#))

Teaching 9/11 and the War on Terror National Survey of Secondary Teachers

September 1, 2019

Prepared by Jeremy Stoddard, Lead Investigator¹

Contributors:

Nathan Jones, UW-Survey Center

Diana Hess, Dean and Professor, UW-Madison School of Education

Principal funding for the project was provided by
the September 11th Education Trust.

Additional funding was provided by the William &
Mary Foundation.



¹ This survey project was conducted through a partnership between the William & Mary School of Education and the University of Wisconsin – Madison Survey Center. Jeremy Stoddard is currently a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. He was on faculty at William & Mary at the time the survey was conducted.

1.0 Introduction

2,977 people died as the result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, and the crash of the hijacked United 93 flight in Shanksville, PA. The resulting Global War on Terror has led to the deaths of nearly 7,000 American military personnel and another 7,000 US Contractors, approximately 1,500 soldiers from allied nations, and countless combatant and civilian deaths in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq². In addition to the lives lost, the financial cost of the war on terror for the US is now reaching 6 trillion dollars, and has reshaped the role of the US in the world.

Given these statistics, and the impact these events have had on the US and world, it would be easy to assume that the September 11th (9/11) attacks and War on Terror (WoT) would feature prominently in the social studies curricula across the country. However, what we have found in our research of how the events of 9/11 and WoT are included in commonly used curriculum materials and state standards is that these events are included unevenly across states in the US and is treated rather superficially in many commonly used textbooks (e.g., Stoddard & Hess, 2016; Stoddard, Hess, & Hammer, 2011). There is little evidence beyond anecdotal stories about how or what is being taught in US middle and high schools or what students are learning about the longest-running conflict in their nation's history.

This report presents the results from the survey responses of 1047 US middle and high school teachers asked to identify what is being taught about the 9/11 attacks and WoT, where in the curriculum it is being taught, why they include it in their curriculum, and any barriers or challenges they perceived to engaging students in these events. What we can't answer here is what exact percentage of US middle and high school social studies teachers teach about the events, as the focus of this survey would likely draw teachers with an interest in the topic or who may be more likely to teach about the events. Therefore, any claims about the percentage of respondents who reported teaching or not teaching about the events would not be reliably representative of the total of all social studies teachers in the US.

What the results from this survey *do* provide is an in-depth account of *what* and *how* these respondent teachers, who form a stratified national sample of teachers across the US, teach about 9/11 and the ways in which these topics are integrated in their curriculum - information of interest to policymakers, journalists, and other groups that have not been available prior to this study. With the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the horizon, the results from this survey provide some answers to the question "What are teachers teaching about the 9/11 attacks and War on Terror?"

² Crawford, N. C. (2018). Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency. *Watson Institute, International & Public Affairs, Brown University [November 2018]*. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2018/Human%20Costs%2C%20Nov,208,202018>. These statistics do not include the conflict in Syria and the US involvement in the conflict that began in 2014. Pakistan is included here because of the many civilian and enemy combatant deaths along the Afghan border, especially resulting from drone strikes.

The findings are organized below using the three following research questions:

- 1) *What, when, and where (in the curriculum) are the events of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, the resulting war on terror, and other controversial events related to terrorism and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other domestic and international issues being taught?*
- 2) *What do teachers see as the value of teaching the 9/11 attacks and related events and issues?*
- 3) *What are the perceived barriers or challenges to teaching these topics?*

1.1 Majority of Teachers Surveyed Report Teaching about 9/11 and WoT Once a Month

Of our 1047 respondents for this survey, some of whom teach more than one of the courses included in the social studies (e.g., US History, Government/Civics, World History), the vast majority reported teaching about the topics of 9/11 and the War on Terror at most once a month. Of the 130 respondents who reported “never” teaching about the events in any class, almost twenty included the caveat that they either only taught about it on the day of the anniversary or at the very end of a US History course after testing, when there was time for teaching about more contemporary events. It is safe to assume then that between 70% to 80% of respondents likely teach about these events somewhere between several times a year to monthly. Please see the methodology section at the end for more details. We are not making the claim here that our sample represents all US secondary social studies teachers’ inclusion of these topics. As this was a survey about teaching 9/11 and the WOT specifically, there is likely a self-selection bias for teachers interested in the topic to choose to participate. However, what we can report on is what and how these teachers in our sample are teaching about the events and that our sample does provide a representative sample of the US in terms of the teachers, their location, and the contexts of where they teach (e.g., urban/rural).

The US history teachers in the survey reported the highest level of overall inclusion of 9/11 and the WoT in their curriculum. However, the data also suggest that this inclusion is concentrated primarily on the anniversary of the attacks and then for some again at the end of the course. For Government and Civics Teachers, who reported a higher level of “weekly” inclusion of the events, the topics most relevant to them could be included across numerous units of study, including executive power, the judiciary, and around the bureaucracies such as the origins of the Department of Homeland Security and the numerous issues that arose from the response to 9/11, such as the privacy and surveillance issues that emerged from the USA Patriot Act. There is also a slightly higher average frequency of including topics related to 9/11 and the WoT reported at the high school level than the middle school level.

Table 1: Frequency of Teaching 9/11 and WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Taught about 9-11/WOT	US Hist	Gov't/Civics	World History	Other Soc Studies
Never	8.4%	9.6%	17.1%	13.9%
About once a month	78.8%	69.9%	70.3%	72.2%
Weekly	8.7%	14.1%	7.1%	8.3%
A few times a week	2.9%	4.1%	3.6%	0.0%
Daily	1.3%	2.4%	1.9%	5.6%

Table 2: Frequency of Teaching 9/11 and WoT by School Level (in %)

Frequency	High School	Middle School	Multiple
Never	12.3%	17.3%	3.7%
About once a month	79.1%	72.7%	66.7%
Weekly	6.2%	7.3%	18.5%
A few times a week	1.7%	1.8%	0.0%
Daily	0.7%	0.9%	11.1%

Note: Some respondents taught multiple subjects. Multiple refers to the 27 respondents who taught some courses in both middle and high school grades.

2. What is being taught about the 9/11 attacks and War on Terror? When and in what courses is it taught? How are students engaged in these events?

2.1 Response and Consequences, bin Laden and al Qaeda, and President George W. Bush

What is being taught about the 9/11 attacks? Across US History, World History, and Government/Civics classes, there is a consistent emphasis on the US and world responses to the attacks, those responsible (bin Laden & al Qaeda), and on then-US President George W. Bush. These three items are the most identified items across the three classes, with *responses and consequences* appearing as the most identified topic in all courses. Osama bin Laden was next most identified, in the second spot for US History and tied for most frequently identified in World History. George W. Bush was the second most identified topic in Government/Civics. Other frequently selected topics include the World Trade Center, victims of the attacks, and United Flight 93 in the US History responses, and causes of the attacks, the WTC and victims in World History and Government/Civics. The inclusion of first responders in teaching the topic is still prominent in the US History responses, but is not prominent in the other two courses, which illustrates the emphasis of teaching about the events on the day of the anniversary in US history classes.

Table 3: Teaching Topics Reported Related to 9/11 by Subject Area (in %)

Topics Selected	US History n=628	Govt Civics n=447	World History n=437	Other n=36
Responses to and consequences of the attacks	81%	70%	62%	67%
Osama bin Laden / al-Qaeda	79%	62%	62%	53%
Causes / Events leading up to 9/11	69%	60%	60%	47%
President George W. Bush	73%	64%	47%	50%
World Trade Center	78%	51%	53%	58%
Victims (e.g., number of victims)	76%	50%	52%	53%
Timeline of the attacks	71%	49%	54%	47%
Flight United 93 (crashed in Shanksville, PA)	74%	48%	46%	50%
Pentagon	72%	47%	46%	44%
The terrorists	64%	49%	53%	58%
Firefighters / first responders	68%	43%	45%	53%
Other, please specify:	15%	13%	9%	31%

Note: Respondents could select all that apply. Some respondents also taught multiple classes.

2.2 Concept of Terrorism Most Consistent Topic in Teaching About the War on Terror.

The broad concept of terrorism was selected as the top choice for each of the classes when respondents were asked what they teach about the ongoing global war on terror. Beyond this topic, the topics selected were more specific to the courses than those selected for teaching about the 9/11 attacks themselves, which is consistent with state academic standards and textbook narratives on this topic. This means that US history teachers identified bin Laden, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Patriot Act in the top five, whereas Government/Civics teachers identified topics more relevant to their course topics, including the Patriot Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and President Bush as part of the executive. The World History teachers were the only respondents to identify Saddam Hussein and the Islamic State (ISIL / ISIS) in the top five, which is consistent with teaching about the events as part of a unit on the modern Middle East.

Two notable trends include the lower frequency of identification of teaching about George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein in US history courses, and the significant lack of including the topic of Guantanamo Bay detainees or their associated US Supreme Court cases. This latter topic was at the bottom of the US and World History lists of selected topics and was second to last for the Government/Civics list, where the Supreme Court cases are a logical item to include. The lack of inclusion of the topics of Hussein in US history and Guantanamo Bay in all courses suggests that teachers may be avoiding topics that may seem more controversial, such as the invasion of Iraq and the treatment of enemy combatants, including the use of torture/enhanced interrogation by US military forces. The topic of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiments in the US was included more prominently as a topic in the World History courses, suggesting that the curriculum in those courses provides opportunities to address that issue.

Table 3: Teaching Topics Related to the WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Topic Selected	US	Govt	World	Other
	History	Civics		
	n=628	n=447	n=437	n=36
Terrorism	86%	74%	74%	75%
Osama bin Laden / al-Qaeda	75%	54%	58%	44%
Afghanistan / Operation Enduring Freedom	65%	49%	49%	22%
Iraq / Operation Iraqi Freedom	64%	47%	48%	31%
Patriot Act (e.g., Surveillance)	64%	61%	32%	31%
President George W. Bush	60%	52%	38%	33%
Department of Homeland Security (e.g., TSA)	60%	58%	32%	22%
Saddam Hussein	55%	36%	42%	42%
Islamic State (aka, ISIS, ISIL)	47%	40%	49%	36%
Islamophobia / anti-Muslim attitudes in the US	50%	40%	40%	42%
Guantanamo Bay Detainees (or associated Supreme Court Cases)	38%	38%	21%	8%
Other, please specify:	5%	5%	4%	6%

2.3 9/11 and WoT Taught Most Frequently on the Anniversary of the Attacks

How and *Where* are these topics integrated into the curriculum? Teachers reported that these topics were taught most often on the anniversary of the attacks. This was consistent across all three courses, but most prominent in US history courses where 497 of the 628 respondents who taught US history identified the anniversary as a place of including the topics. The next most frequent selections were consistent with the courses, including “Within the history of the US” for US history respondents, “In the context of a particular historical period” for World History, and “As an event that changes US politics or government” for Government/Civics.

Table 4: Curricular Context of Teaching about 9/11 and WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Response	US	Govt	World	Other
	History n=628	Civics n=447		
On the anniversary of the attack (September 11th)	79%	66%	62%	75%
As a current event - the ongoing war on terror	59%	57%	45%	47%
As an event that changed US politics or Government	61%	66%	29%	42%
In the context of a particular historical period	58%	40%	47%	33%
Within the history of the United States	62%	42%	28%	17%
As an international event or in an international context	29%	28%	41%	39%

In addition to asking where in the curriculum the events were integrated, we also were interested in knowing what value the teachers saw in teaching the events. Teachers who responded to our survey overwhelmingly agreed that the value in teaching about 9/11 and the WoT was that it was viewed as “significant events in US history.” This was the top selection by a wide margin for US history (61%) and Govt/Civics teachers (40%). For World teachers, selecting the significant option (28%) was a close second to “the events help me to teach about issues in an international context” (30%). Among the least identified value was that 9/11 and the WoT are “useful events for developing student religious and social tolerance” which again suggests that teachers are not engaging their students in more controversial aspects of the events – or at least identify that as the fundamental reason for teaching the events.

2.4 Documentaries, Current Events, and Personal Stories Dominate Strategies for Teaching 9/11 and the WoT

When asked what teaching strategies and materials are used most frequently to engage students in 9/11 and the WoT, the two most frequently identified methods for all three courses were the use of some kind of documentary film or video and the discussion of a current event related to 9/11 or the WoT. The next most frequently identified strategy, while a distant third for each course, was the use of personal or family stories. This third strategy relates to the engagement of memories or personal connections, such as where they were when a historic event happened or the personal experiences of family members in a conflict, commonly used with other historic conflicts such as World War II, the US role in Vietnam, or the assassination of John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King. The use of current events as a strategy for connecting to the events helps to explain why the topic may come up on a monthly or weekly basis, and is of interest as research has suggested a lack of including current events in the curriculum during the era of accountability and high stakes testing.

Table 5: Reported Strategies for Teaching 9/11 and the WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Response	US History	Govt Civics	World	Other
Watched a documentary or similar video about the 9/11 attacks or war on terror	76%	54%	55%	44%
Discussed a current event related to 9/11 or WoT	58%	56%	43%	47%
Discussed the 9/11 attacks or WoT in relation to students' personal or family experiences	49%	36%	33%	44%
Examined popular representations in which the 9/11 attacks or war on terror is a theme (e.g., music, graphic novels, photos)	40%	30%	28%	31%
Required students to compare the 9/11 attacks or WoT with other historical events (e.g., Pearl Harbor)	41%	24%	30%	6%
Read fiction or nonfiction stories in which the 9/11 attacks or war on terror is a theme	21%	17%	19%	28%
Had students compare and contrast two or more texts describing the 9/11 attacks or war on terror and asked them to differentiate	17%	16%	16%	6%
Watched a fiction film or television show about the 9/11 attacks or war on terror	15%	14%	11%	11%
Engaged in a foreign policy simulation related to the 9/11 attacks or war on terror	4%	7%	5%	6%
Participated in a webinar or distance learning	2%	3%	1%	3%

2.5 Recorded News Footage, Documentaries, and Anniversary Specials Shown Most Often

Given that the majority of Americans (as well as those around the world) likely found out about the attacks through national network news or radio networks – and probably saw some television coverage live or in replay that day – it is easy to understand why showing this footage in class is the most frequent form of film or video used. *The Today Show* (NBC) is the most frequently mentioned, although a wide variety of raw feed or edited clips from news broadcasts are cited by the teachers, and especially the dominant news sources such as NBC, CNN, CBS, and ABC. Following the news footage of the day, documentaries or news specials made for the first, fifth or tenth anniversaries were also frequently identified. These include *102 Minutes* (2008, History Channel), *Inside 9-11* (2005, National Geographic), *Remembering 911* (PBS or CNN). The most frequently identified documentary film was *9/11* (2002), the documentary created by two French directors, the Naudet brothers, who were filming the probationary period of a New York City fireman whose company responded to the World Trade Center on September 11th.

In addition to these documentaries and news programs that focus specifically on the attacks at the World Trade Center and Pentagon, several short films and news magazine programs (e.g., Frontline) focus on different perspectives of that day. These include the short film *Boatlift* (2011), about the role of ferries and other boats that evacuated people from lower Manhattan, *The Man in the Red Bandana* (2017), about Wesley Crowther, who was seen rescuing numerous people in the South Tower, and *The Flight that Fought Back* (2005), about the passengers on flight United 93 who attempted to retake their plane from hijackers and ultimately perished when it crashed in Pennsylvania. While not identified as frequently, videos from BrainPop, Nickelodeon, CNN Student News or educational videos produced by news or September 11th organizations for use in the classroom. These films and videos focus primarily on footage showing what happened during the attacks, the timeline of events, and the perspectives of first responders, victims and survivors of the attacks, and those impacted afar. Overall, these films emphasize the horrors of the day for most Americans and the role of heroes who responded.

Several themes emerge from the films and videos identified by the respondents. The reliance on news footage and other sources depicting the attacks reflects the role these events play in recent American memory and the desire of teachers to help their students know what the events looked like. They now recognize that their present students have no memory of these attacks or how they have changed US society – which they have grown up in and been affected by. It is also notable the lack of films about the War on Terror. Some Frontline episodes or similar programs were identified as being used, including some recent programs focused on the Islamic State and one teacher who identified using the film *Restrepo* (2010), which is a documentary about combat in Afghanistan. However, these were few compared to the films and videos of the attacks themselves. This reinforces the evidence that most teachers likely emphasize their teaching of 9/11 and the WoT on the day of the anniversary and not in-depth in other areas of the curriculum.

It is also of interest that few fiction films were identified. The one most commonly identified was *Flight 93* (2006), a made for television feature based on the passengers aboard United Flight 93, was the most frequently identified (*United 93*, a Hollywood feature film on the same events was also released in 2006). The literature identified by teachers followed a similar trend, with a focus on news articles and magazine articles on the attacks far more frequently than fiction or biographies. If 9/11 is viewed primarily as a significant event that needs to be witnessed and memorialized, then the selections of these films make sense. It also, however, reflects the trend that the vast majority of teachers who responded for one reason or another are also avoiding the more controversial aspects of the War on Terror (e.g., Guantanamo Bay, justification for invading Iraq) as well as the causes contributing to the 9/11 attacks (e.g., US involvement in Soviet occupied Afghanistan).

3. The Perceived Value of, and Barriers to, Teaching 9/11 and the War on Terror

3.1 The Perceived Significance of 9/11 and Alignment with Standards Motivate Teaching

What do teachers see in the value of teaching 9/11 attacks and related events? For the US History and Govt./Civics respondents, it is the significance of the events in US history. Only the World history teachers saw the ability to teach in international contexts as the most valuable aspect of teaching about 9/11 and the WoT, with the perceived significance of the events were identified in a close second. Similar to the item included above on where in the curriculum these events are integrated – the least frequently overall selected option for how the teachers we surveyed viewed the value of teaching these events was “for developing student religious and social tolerance.”

Table 6: Perceived Value of Teaching about 9/11 and WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Response	US History	Govt Civics	World	Other
They are significant events in US history.	61%	40%	28%	17%
The events help me to teach about issues in an international context.	7%	11%	30%	17%
It is an important theme within the curriculum I am already teaching.	10%	14%	8%	25%
The events reflect American citizenship and patriotism at a time of crisis.	9%	15%	6%	14%
They are useful events for developing student religious and social tolerance.	5%	4%	9%	14%

In addition to the perceived significance of the events, our respondents also identified inclusion of the events of 9/11 and the WoT aligned with state academic standards they were required to teach. The US history teachers in particular reported that their inclusion of these events “often” or “always” met state academic standards (64%). For Govt/Civics teachers, 55% reported that teaching these events often or always met standards, and 50% of World History teachers reported that including the events often or always met standards. In further analysis, we saw a significant relationship between the frequency of including the events of 9/11 and WoT with the level to which the respondents reported that this teaching met state standards. While this may seem like common sense, it is important to note the role of state standards, regardless of whether or not the state may have an accountability measure aligned with the standards (e.g., test), that there appears to be higher rates of teaching the events if they are included in the standards. Of course, what they mean by teaching the events can also vary widely. There is a strong connection between teaching toward standards or high stakes testing and a very “shallow” curriculum focused on the memorization of facts with little to no reasoning, writing, or authentic intellectual engagement (for more on how 9/11 and the WoT have been incorporated into state academic standards, see Stoddard, Hess, and Henne (2017)).

3.2 Not in the Standards Most Frequently Cited for Never Teaching about 9/11 and WoT

What, then, were the perceived barriers to teaching about these events? Among those who identified “Never” teaching about 9/11 or the WoT, the most frequently identified reason was that the topics did not relate to the standards for that course, regardless of which course they were teaching. Of those who marked never, the second most frequently selected category was “other” – with responses frequently noting that they do not get that far in a US history course or that they do briefly bring up the event on the anniversary of the attacks, but not in a substantial way that would cause them to select something other than never (note, we did not have a specific selection for just the anniversary or a “once a semester”).

3.3 Barriers to Teaching include Lack of Curriculum Resources and Concerns about how Students and Parents may React

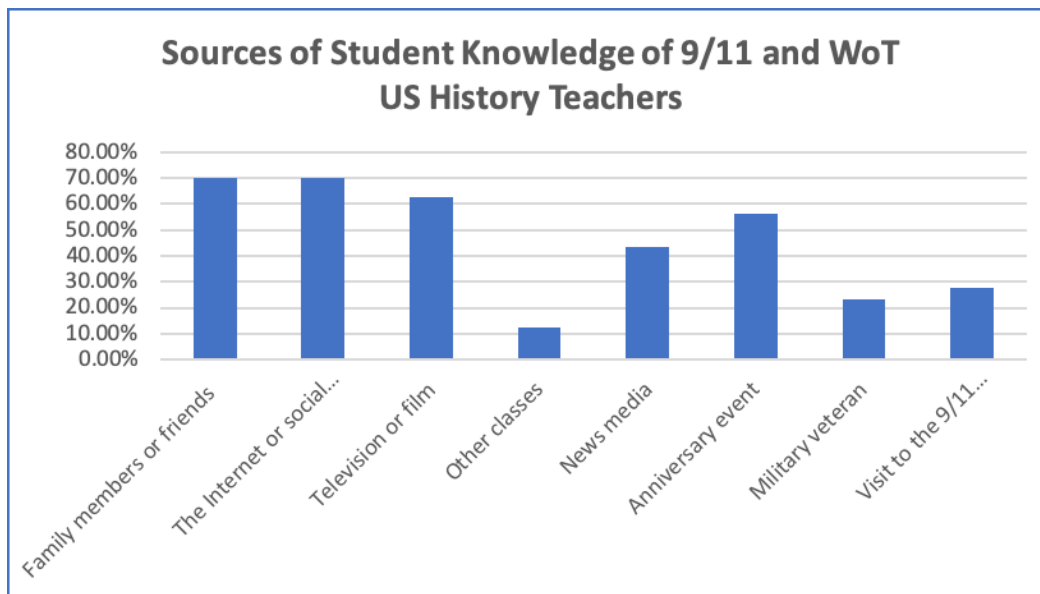
In addition to the reasons provided for not teaching about the events, we also asked the teachers to identify what barriers they perceived to being able to teach about 9/11 and the WoT. The most frequently identified barrier to teaching the events was a lack of curriculum resources. This was consistent across all three courses. Two of the other most frequently identified perceived barriers were the teachers’ concern for how students or parents and community members might react to lessons on the events. As with the reasons provided above for never teaching about the events, the second most frequently identified response was “other.” The most frequently identified “other” explanations include the lack of background knowledge students have about the 9/11 attacks, the perceived limited class time and constraints of state or local curriculum, and the amount of student misinformation or belief in conspiracy theories about 9/11. One of the most frequently identified areas of misunderstanding in the other category related to students’ beliefs about Islam and its relation to terrorism.

Table 6: Perceived Barriers to Teaching about 9/11 and WoT by Subject Area (in %)

Response	US History	Govt Civics	World	Other
I don’t have the curriculum or materials that I need to address this topic.	23%	21%	21%	22%
Other, please specify:	23%	19%	17%	25%
I am concerned about how my students might react to lessons on this topic.	22%	19%	18%	14%
I am concerned about how parents or community members might react to lessons on this topic.	18%	16%	15%	11%
This topic does not relate to the standards for this class.	15%	15%	16%	22%
I am concerned about how administrators might react to lessons on this topic.	9%	8%	7%	6%
I don’t feel prepared to facilitate discussions on this topic.	4%	3%	3%	8%

These barriers may be explained in part by what students referred to as sources of previous knowledge about 9/11 and the WoT (see Figure 1 for US History responses). Across all classes, the top two sources for previous knowledge of the events identified by teachers included family and friends and the internet or social media (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram). These sources may in part contribute to the misinformation or rise in conspiracy theories students refer to in class. On the bottom of the list of identified sources was also consistent, with other classes and veterans being referred to least often. This also suggests that there is a lack of depth of teaching about the events outside of the anniversary or the US history courses – or that topics related to these events are not explicitly identified as responses to the 9/11 attacks (e.g., Patriot Act). It also suggests that many Americans have little connection to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan.

Figure 1: Student Identified Sources of Knowledge of 9/11 and WoT in Classes



The issue of relevance to standards was also frequently identified as a challenge to teaching the events, and is connected to the “other” responses identified, such as a perceived lack of time and the constraints of the curriculum. The teachers either did not see how these events fit with their courses or felt that they could not veer from the official curriculum topics. For those teaching ancient history may not have seen the relevance or, like some of the US history teachers, may not reach the twenty-first century chronologically within the course. For those courses with an end of course exam, either Advanced Placement or in a state with a high-stakes social studies exam, there is a framework for what will be tested and what is not in that framework is often passed over. The least frequently identified items also seem to be relevant – as there seemed to be far less concern about the support of administrators or the teachers’ own perceived abilities to engage students in these topics.

Table 7: Perceived Barriers to Teaching 9/11 and the WoT

Response	US History	Govt Civics	World	Other
I don't have the curriculum or materials that I need to address this topic.	23%	21%	21%	22%
Other, please specify:	23%	19%	17%	25%
I am concerned about how my students might react to lessons on this topic.	22%	19%	18%	14%
I am concerned about how parents or community members might react to lessons on this topic.	18%	16%	15%	11%
This topic does not relate to the standards for this class.	15%	15%	16%	22%
I am concerned about how administrators might react to lessons on this topic.	9%	8%	7%	6%
I don't feel prepared to facilitate discussions on this topic.	4%	3%	3%	8%

4. Curriculum Resources and Professional Development

Given that many teachers surveyed found a lack of curriculum resources to be a barrier, it is important to also understand where the teachers were finding curriculum resources and whether or not they had participated in any kind of professional development activities related to 9/11 and the WoT. Not surprisingly, especially given the high numbers of teachers who reported using video streamed from YouTube or other sources, 744 or 71% of our respondents identified using websites and online resources in their teaching. In addition, 341 or 33% identified using curriculum materials created by a non-profit or other educational organization, 241 or 23% identified using approved textbooks and 221 (21%) identified using materials from a colleague.

4.1 Curriculum from *Teaching Tolerance* and the *National September 11th Memorial and Museum* used Most Often

Specific curriculum from non-profits and other organizations that were identified frequently, by at least 100 of our respondents, include those developed by *Teaching Tolerance*, *National September 11 Memorial & Museum*, *Center for Civic Education*, *Scholastic*, and *The Choices Program at Brown University*. The top three selected curriculum are all available free online, which may be an important factor. However, two other free resources, those from the *Newseum* and the curriculum developed by the *New Jersey Commission for Holocaust Education*, were not frequently selected.

Respondents also identified additional resources they used from groups such as *Project Look Sharp*, a media literacy education group, and resources from *National Geographic*, *Discovery*, several other 9/11 Memorials, and groups focused on teaching the constitution such as *Constitutional Rights Foundation* and the *Bill of Rights Institute*. Many also referred to using primary sources, including news coverage of the period and key documents such as excerpts from the 9/11 Commission Report and the USA Patriot Act.

4.2 Majority of Teachers Surveyed Want Professional Development and Updated Resources

We also asked the teachers if they had participated in any professional development activities related to 9/11 and the WoT. 50 respondents had participated in some kind of professional development, with multiple identifying workshops at the *National September 11 Memorial & Museum* and *Teaching American History* or *Gilder Lehrman* summer institutes taught in and around New York or Washington DC. Others identified local workshops or sessions at state or national social studies education conferences. In addition to these traditional forms of professional development, a number of respondents identified their own experience in the military (e.g., being deployed to Iraq) or undergraduate or graduate courses that they had taken that included these events.

While the vast majority of respondents had not participated in any professional learning related to 9/11 and the WoT, 617 respondents (over 50%) noted that they would like the opportunity to participate in these activities. Based on comments and the types of curricular resources that were commonly identified, there appears to be a need for resources to teach about 9/11 to students who do not remember the events and activities that could be used within one class period. The timeline from the *National September 11th Memorial and Museum* was a commonly identified resource, for example (<https://timeline.911memorial.org/>).

Finally, many noted the lack of resources that are up to date to teach about the War on Terror, so they rely on engaging with the events as current events through news sources and their own research. Finally, given the emphasis in The Common Core curriculum and state academic standards on using informational texts and primary sources, many teachers appear to engage their students in primary sources related to the 9/11 attacks and WoT. This also seems relevant as a number of respondents identified the need to counter misinformation or conspiracy theories – and the use of primary sources and the video from the day would be useful toward both the goal of providing knowledge of the events for students and to counter misinformation.

5. Summary

This report provides answers to the often-asked question of what teachers are teaching about the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC and the ensuing Global War on Terror. Respondents to our survey teach a broad number of topics about 9/11 and the WoT. These sources and topics are focused primarily on the events of September 11th, the heroes of the day, and on the impact to the US in the aftermath. The focus on teaching, much like in the years soon after the attacks, occurs primarily on the anniversary and includes topics and narratives emphasizing a national response and heroism in the face of terrorists. Beyond the common focus on the anniversary, the data presented above also illustrates the numerous ways in which some teachers are integrating the events of 9/11 and WoT across the social studies curriculum – and the numerous goals that teachers identify as the objectives for engaging students in these events. In particular, the qualitative data collected from the study identify the various film, video, and literature or non-fiction texts used in teaching these events.

Finally, these findings also illustrate the desire on many teachers' part to engage their students in more depth in the events, with standards and time often identified as a constraint. See our analysis of how the topics related to 9/11 and the WoT are integrated into state academic standards for more details on how standards function as both a tool for inclusion and a limitation for depth of teaching about the events (Stoddard, Hess & Brooks, 2017). The challenges identified related to this new generations' lack of any knowledge of 9/11 and the WoT and belief in misinformation or even conspiracies was identified as a major concern. It is important to note that while our respondents did not frequently identify religious tolerance as a goal for teaching the events of 9/11 and WoT, many did identify a rising misunderstanding of Islam as a challenge to teaching the events. They also seek additional opportunities for professional development and resources that are updated for teaching students who have no memory of the events within the time available in the typical standardized curriculum.

In our previous work, we noted the challenge presented by teaching about events that were still ongoing, and the tension here is illustrated as some teachers engage students in only the anniversary as a form of memorial, while others want students to understand how the US and world response to 9/11 has impacted their lives. Still others have found ways to tie the recent history into units such as the Modern Middle East or by asking students to compare the 9/11 attacks with Pearl Harbor or other historical events. We noticed that the vast majority of the teachers in our study did not report engaging students in any depth on the many causes leading to the 9/11 attacks or the invasion of Iraq, the controversies related to the conflicts that followed (e.g., Guantanamo), or use the events to challenge views of Islam and terrorism. However, while not the majority, many of the teachers in this survey did report engaging their students in these topics and many more topics that we did provide as options in the survey. Potential implications of this study include how the findings may be used by curriculum writers, teachers, and policymakers for developing future curriculum and policy related to teaching about 9/11 and the WoT.

6. Methodology and Sample Description

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) conducted the Teaching about 9/11 and the War on Terror Survey for Jeremy Stoddard of the William & Mary School of Education, Department of Curriculum & Instruction. UWSC provided assistance with survey and project design and data collection. Data and documentation were provided to the client for analysis and reporting.

Target or survey population

The target population for this study was middle and high school social studies teachers who had taught US History, Government or Civics, World History, or similar classes in the past 18 months. The representative stratified sample was comprised of 26,843 US middle and high school teachers from public and private schools provided by education marketing firm MDR. The sample was constructed to be proportional to the number of secondary social studies teachers estimated for each state and region as stated in US Department of Education or individual state department of education databases. The response was similarly proportional.

Response rate

The survey was sent out via email in the second week of November 2018 and was kept open until mid-December, 2018. We sent out with three reminders to those participants who had not started or not completed the survey at that time. It is difficult to calculate an exact response rate given it is unknown how many of the emails were filtered or blocked by email servers, but our calculated response rate was at least 3.5% with a total of 947 participants completing the entire survey and an additional 100 participants completing all of the items related to teaching about 9/11 and the War on Terror. These 1047 participants responses are included in the report. Our response rate was deemed acceptable as for this type of survey a 2% response rate is viewed as typical and acceptable as a representative sample.

Consent

All survey respondents provided consent to participate in the project. The instrument administered to the respondents includes confidentiality language required for studies deemed minimal risk by the William and Mary IRB (Approved Protocol EDIRC-2018-10-05-13176-jdstod). Information relevant to confidentiality is also included in the emails sent to respondents.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed specifically for this project. Some items or sections were included or adapted from previously developed and conducted surveys with permission of their authors. These surveys include *The Inequality Project* led by John Rogers and Joel Westheimer and *A National Survey of Civics and U.S. Government Teachers* conducted by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE). Items related to teaching about the events of September 11, 2001, in the US and ongoing War on Terror were informed by previous research conducted by Diana Hess and Jeremy Stoddard.

References:

Stoddard, J. & Hess, D. (2016). 9/11 and the war on terror in American secondary curriculum fifteen years later. In Journell, W. (Ed.) *Reassessing the Social Studies Curriculum: Promoting Critical Civic Engagement in a politically polarized, Post-9/11 World* (pp. 15-28). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Press.

Stoddard, J., Hess, D., & Hammer, C. (2011). The challenges of writing “first draft history”: The evolution of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath in school textbooks in the United States. In Yates, L. and Grumet, M. (eds). *2011 World Yearbook of Education: Curriculum in today’s world: Identities, politics, work, and knowledge*, (pp. 223-236). New York: Routledge.

Stoddard, J., Hess, D., & Henne, B. (2017). *9/11 and the War on Terror in Curriculum and States Standards Documents Data Set*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin – Madison.
<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/79299>

Creative Commons License:

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Recommended citation for this document:

Stoddard, J. (September 1, 2019). *Teaching 9/11 and the war on terror national survey of secondary teachers*. Madison, Wi: University of Wisconsin – Madison.