The Mishnah is a seminal Jewish text. Compiled around the year 200 CE in ancient Palestine, it became the foundation of the two Talmuds and thus, all later Judaism. But it is still in many ways a mystery: Why was it compiled? Who was its intended audience and what was its function? What are its antecedents?

This graduate seminar has two interlocked goals. One is to strengthen your ability, both linguistic and conceptual, to read and decode the Mishnah and its “companion volume,” the Tosefta (although we will discuss further the nature of their relationship). The second is to survey and gain some facility with modern scholarly approaches to the Mishnah. In the process we will also discuss the social historical and religious implications of our tractate, *Bava Metzia*.

**Instructor Information**
Michael Satlow, Professor, Program in Judaic Studies and Department of Religious Studies, Brown University

**Objectives, Approach, Structure**
The goals of this course are:

1. To improve your technical and linguistic ability to deal with the Mishnah, and by extension, other tannaitic texts;
2. To introduce you to the critical study of rabbinic literature;
3. To apply methods of critical reading to a collaborative and close reading of a single tractate.

The capstone of the class is the creation of individual commentaries on a chapter of Mishnah. The commentary will be ongoing throughout the semester and will give you an opportunity to apply the critical principles that we read about to a specific text. This is a bit experimental, and we will work out and adjust the precise mechanics throughout the semester.

Our time in class will usually be divided into three parts: Discussion of the secondary reading; reading together, translating, and discussing the primary text from the Mishnah and Tosefta; and discussing issues that arise in your work on your commentary.

**Books**
All books are on reserve in the library (or available online). Although you are not required to purchase any books, you may want to; some will be useful to you in the future. We will be reading several essays from the *Cambridge Companion* volume and it may be particularly convenient to have this on hand. The other books as well are recommended:


Because this is a class geared at more advanced research I have not made pdf copies of the essays. You should access the essays directly from the books. That should also give you an opportunity to acquaint yourself with each book as a whole.

**Requirements and Grading**

You are expected to attend every class prepared. Preparation includes: (1) reading in full the secondary assignment and having formed some questions and/or reactions to it; (2) preparing the assigned mishnaic text so that you are able to read, translate, and attempt to explain it, using a clean copy and no notes; and (3) having completed the commentary assignment for that day (if applicable).

You will lead the class discussion for one or two sets of secondary readings and one or two actual reading sessions.

Your grade will primarily be determined by your work on the commentary. You will choose a chapter of Mishnah to work on through the semester. Your commentary will then attend to the following details:

1. Critical edition of the text, with noting of manuscript variants;
2. Noting of all parallels found in early Jewish literature;
3. Summary of past scholarship on your text;
4. Redactional commentary – can we discern the Mishnah’s sources and redactional principles? What is its relationship to the relevant passages from the Tosefta and other rabbinic literature?
5. Explanation: What does your passage mean?
6. Intended audience;
7. Assumptions of realia, legal principles and application, etc.
8. Larger conceptual discussion

Drafts of your commentaries will be discussed the last week or two of the semester.

**Tentative Schedule**
I have not put in firm targets for our primary reading. We will spend most of class working on Mishnah *Bava Metzia*. I would like to finish all ten chapters plus some reading in the Tosefta but that will depend on our pace in class. Note also that I have scheduled class during some of the Jewish holidays. If this is a concern for anyone, please let me know.

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1. **Introduction**

2. **Introduction to the Contemporary Study of the Mishnah (and Tosefta)**
   
   **Reading:**
   
   1. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, pp. 119-181 (you need not read this carefully);

   Prepare the following relevant biblical passages to translate in class:
   

3. **Manuscripts**

   **Reading:**
   
   3. Familiarize yourself with [http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/talmud/indexeng.htm](http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/talmud/indexeng.htm) and [http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-00470-00001/7](http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-00470-00001/7). Can you compare the Albeck version of the first Mishnah of *Bava Metzia* with those found in MS. Kaufmann and MS Add.470.1?
   5. Tosefta *Bava Betzia* 1:1

   Begin reading Mishnah *Bava Metzia*. 

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| 4 | Transmission and Orality  
**Reading:**  
Continue reading primary text. |
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| 5 | Mishnah and Scripture  
**Reading:**  
Continue primary text.  
Present a sample of the manuscript section of your chapter. |
| 6 | Mishnah and Midrash  
**Reading:**  
D. Weiss Halivni, *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law*  
Continue primary text. |
| 7 | Mishnah and Tosefta  
**Reading:**  
Continue primary text. Passages from the Tosefta will also be assigned, depending on where we are in the text. |
| 8 | Mishnah and History  
**Reading:**  
1. Naftali Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis*;  

Continue primary reading. Present a sample from your chapter of the relationship between the Mishnah and the Tosefta.

| 9 | **Mishnah and Jewish Law**  
**Reading:**  

Continue reading primary text. |

| 10 | **Mishnah and Philosophy**  
**Reading:**  

Continue reading primary text. |

| 11 | **Mishnah and Feminist Critique**  
**Reading:**  

Continue reading primary text. |

| 12 | **Primary Text Reading**  
Continue reading primary text |

| 13 | **Student Presentations and Conclusions** |