

A STUDY OF COLLEGE SLANG IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

By

Masayoshi YAMADA*

Several papers appeared on college slang in American English in the 1960's. They advocated the necessity of the preparation of a lexicon of college slang (Kratz 1964, Poston 1964, Schonhorn 1963). We have, however, a difficulty in determining if a given word is college slang or general slang. If we propose a definition that college slang words are those used exclusively on campus, the lexicon will not necessarily reject to include a comparatively uninteresting lexicon of technical terminology referring to course names and campus buildings.¹⁾ Banchemo and Flinn (1967: 52), after discussing the former literatures, state that:

...we shall call slang learned on campus college slang.

College slang by this definition is by no means found exclusively on campus, since it is being transmitted to the larger culture.

The first part of the lists of college slang was gathered in an apartment life of the University of Kansas students during 1978-1979 in the City of Lawrence, Kansas.²⁾ The slang was developed over a period of four years by the twenty students and some of their friends. Some of the words and phrases were original or had original meanings, and the creation of these had been fairly well distributed among the group and their friends. The rest of the slang had been adopted by the group from things they read or heard. In some cases this adopted slang was left in its original form, and some of it were modified to relate to different items or actions than those for which it was originally intended.

The function of this special language was to relate new experiences to previous ones and to express complex ideas. Some of the terms were used to express concepts that were typical of college males, such as the words used to describe girls and those which were insults. The bizarre senses of humor of the group had played an important part in the creation of the original slang. They were inspired by comedy albums, comedy acts, comic books and television comedies. These sources also provided them with much of the adopted slang. It was usually just a spontaneous reaction to something or someone.

The second part of the lists of college slang is a compilation of the past several literatures of college slang. The list will be valued from the historical discussion of college slang. Some of the items have long been used mainly by students, but they are also found in off-campus situations.³⁾

DICTIONARY I

amoeba [əmi: bə] *n.* An insult used to make a person feel as small as possible.

*Department of English, Faculty of Education, Shimane University, Matsue, 690 JAPAN.

beef-trust Can be used to replace any part of a rock group's name. *The Rolling Beef-trust*; *Country Joe and the Beef-trust*. cf. Any group of stout or fat people; specif., a chorus of large, stout, or fat girls or women, or a baseball or football team composed of exceptionally, large, stout, or fat players. (DAS)

big hairy deal Used to belittle something.

cf. **big deal** Sarcastically, anything or anyone believed to be unimportant, uninteresting, or unimpressive. Wide student use since c1940. Often used as a belittling exclamation to deflate another's enthusiasm, as in reply to a suggestion or an eager proposal. (DAS)

Bite the big one Means something is "classically bad." Another related phrase is, "That really bites."

[<From the television show, *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 90 min.)]

bladder count A numerical system used to measure the intensity of odor in a men's dorm room. [<Originated from the expression, "This room smells like the inside of a basketball bladder."]

bwana [bwá:nɜ] *n.* Used as a term of respect or affection. [<Swahili *master, boss*]

clandestine operations hat *n.* A dark colored stocking cap.

dead meat *adj.* Tired. See **meat**.

Death comes quickly in Mubunga Country. Originated when it was blurted out during a test. The typical usage of it would be under adverse circumstances or to comment on a passing scene, such as a car wreck. "Fate weaves a strange web for the ape man" is used as a reply. [<From *Tarzan*.] cf. Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914).

Die! Used as a command. Other forms are: "Go die!", "Die, he suggested.", "Go die someplace." From *Bored of the Rings* by the *Harvard Lampoon* (Harvard University's satirical school newspaper).

Eat! Eat! Eat! A dinner call uttered in a high pitched voice. [<From *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller.]

Eat a rock An insult used to make a person be quiet. It is similar to "Go jump in a lake." It is not expected to be taken literally.

Enough ___ to choke a major horse Changed from the common phrase "To choke a horse." A longer version is "To choke a horse or other viviparous mammals." The blank can be filled by most nouns.

flit, wart, toad, poop, creep, shrimp Official insult list adopted from *Bored of the Rings* by the *Harvard Lampoon*. Added to this list were *twerp, jerk, wimp, nerd, slimz, fladge, swine, worm, fish, slut, punk, and wuss*. The list is most effective when memorized. Most of these insults can be followed by the words "face" or "head", as in "fish face" or "slime head."

flunk, The incredible 4-handed A cheer given before entering a test. Hands are clasped and "flunk" is chanted rapidly seven times.

Give 'em all a surprise Meaning is self-explanatory. [<From Elton John's song, "Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself."]

God, ___ is a Used to describe perfection. Variations include: "I'm a real God.", "That was a Godlike thing to do."

Ha, ha, you lose Indicate bad luck.

hit me Means "to continue," "go ahead."

huit [ɥit] *n.* French word for the number 8. Used as a threat.

I'll take ___ of those The blank can be filled with any number and the phrase is to be directed at a female.

Jackson Bear Whoop! An exclamation. *Whoop* is the sound made by a burglar alarm on a car. *Jackson Bear* is also the name of the honey dispenser. The plural form, *Jackson Bears*, is what the students call their intramural teams.

kick a little ___ ass Used as an expression of achievement. "I *kicked a little Shakespeare ass* today." means "I did really well in my Shakespeare class today."

kilo-bwana A measure of time used in phrases such as, "I haven't seen him in many a long *kilo-bwana*."

Korzybsky burgers An undefined phrase used to belittle the works of semanticist **Alfred Korzybski** (1879-1950).

lmooh [lmu:] Letters for the words "Let me out of here."

Look, a 1927 Indian head nickel! A phrase used to distract.

Look, the winged victory of Samothrace! A phrase used to distract. [From *Bored of the Rings* by the *Harvard Lampoon*]

meat, (dead) adj. Means "tired": I'm *meat*; He's *meat*. *cf.* The verb form is to **meatify** (*Past form meatified*).

mobin' Means "moving": Your feets get *mobin'*. [From a Firesign Theatre album.]

my face off, ___ The space can be filled by almost any verb. *Eat my face off*; *Burn my face off*.

nee nee option Any car with a Synchro-mesh transmission is said to have the *nee nee option*. "Nee nee" is the sound made as the car is being down-shifted into low gear.

pickle This is used as a bridge term. It is derived from the code phrase, "The wall looks like *pickles*," which indicates to the partner to throw in the hand.

Pull your head out Means to "get with it."

radioactive socks *n.* Extremely dirty socks.

reep, reep, reep alpha particle Used to indicate personal insanity. A derivative of this is "reep," used as an expression of surprise. Appeared in the *University Daily Kansan* cartoon and Personals column.

river sticks *n.* Branches found and used for poking and digging during river stomping.

river stomping *n.* The action of exploring the banks of a river and in some cases the river itself. It can be shortened to "stomp" as verb: Let's go *stomp* a river.

six *n.* The universal constant. It can be used to substitute for any numerical answer on any test.

snarking *n.* Refers to clandestine operations.

snee *adv.* This is a negative expression first said to ridicule a boring speaker. A variation would be "snay."

sniddlewhap [snídlihwæp] *n.* Used to replace a large word that has been forgotten. *That's a big electronic sniddlewhap*. [?]

spaz [spæz] *n., vi.* [From *spastic*.] *cf.* to **spaz out**.

Spock *n.* The nickname of one of the group because he is very logical, like Commander Mr. Spock (First Officer) on *Star Trek* (Science-fiction. Hugo Award-winning TV series created by Gene Roddenberry).

cf. The TV series lasted from September 8, 1966 to April 4, 1969 when it was cancelled by NBC.

springy mass *n.* A term used to describe one of the students' hair.

table furniture *n.* Term used for "dishes."

The Time *n.* Refers to a coat hanger wrapped around a gas filler cap in a Ford Galaxy.

It is used for breaking into the car when the keys are locked inside.

toodle *vi.* To drive aimlessly. [⟨From *toodle-oo* (Imitation of automobile horn)?]

validation *n.* The act of impaling a McDonald's fruit pie with one's index finger.

V. O. L. Abbreviation for "vision of loveliness." It is used to describe a good looking girl. Can be shortened to **V** and then to a rating system: *V of the first order*; *V of the second order*; *semi-V*; *null V*.

wah da do da Means "et cetera." [⟨From a Firesign Theatre Record.⟩]

The Wright is with us Used to indicate incredible luck. [⟨Wright is one of the students who always has good luck.⟩]

You don't know ass from butt A negative expression. Usually found to be self-explanatory.

Z-blower Means someone who is really boring. [⟨From *ZZZ* (the sound of a person's snoring).⟩]

DICTIONARY II

Abbreviated Sources : Banchero and Flinn (1967) [BF]

Kohl (1973) [K]

White (1955) [W]

aggie *n.* A person lacking in social finesse, a hick. [BF]

anchor *n.* Postponed exam. [W]

asiatic; **buggy** *adj.* Upset by mentally disturbed. [W]

bad dough *n.* Poor grades. [W]

be my guest *v. phr.* Used when someone asks for something: 'Join me' or 'Go right ahead'. [W]

beast; **cheek**; **mattress mary**; **nymph**; **pig**; **sexpot** *n.* Woman of loose morals. See also **chick**; for another sense, see **big zero**. [W]

beating the bushes *v. phr.* Looking for a date. [W]

beaver shooting *n.* A mild form of voyeurism consisting of scanning the girls' dormitory windows for whatever visual pleasures they might reveal. The usual vantage point for beaver shooting is a window in a nearby men's dormitory. [BF]

biddy *n.* Mean woman. [W]

big A; **cove** *n.* A local term referring to the Alcove Bar, a cocktail lounge near the Wayne campus. [W]

big blast; **festivity**; **kick**; **small scene** *n.* A drinking party. [W]

big zero; **creep**; **drip**; **goon boy**; **monster**; **a nothing** *n.* Someone who doesn't amount to much socially: 'He's a real nothing.' He is also referred to as a 'beast,' or as being 'beastly' or 'uncouth.' Occasionally the Second World War term *sad sack* is still heard.

[W]

bitch *n.* Hard course or rough schedule. [W]

bizad *n.* Business Administration student. [W]

body snatcher *n.* One who steals another's date. [W]

- bolt** *n.* A class cut by a professor. [W]
- bong song** *n.* The sound of the campus chimes. [W]
- bread** *n.* Money. 'I'm dragged with being without *bread*' (I'm tired of being broke). [W]
- broad** *n.* A young woman or girl. The connotation is pejorative. [BF]
- BTO** (*big-time operation*) *n.* Wolf-type man. [W]
- buggy** *adj.* See **asiatic**. [W]
- cadaver kid** *n.* First-year medical student. [W]
- campus roar** *n.* Egotistical professor. [W]
- cancer center** *n.* Tobacco shop in the Student Center Building. [W]
- cheek** *n.* See **beast**, **chick**. [W]
- chick ; crazy break ; local talent ; neat job ; snatch ; talent ; trim ; unfair sex** *n.* Girl, usually pretty. Often used to refer to a woman of loose morals. 'The *chick* is real cool freak'; 'Dig that crazy *chick*.' *Freak chick* here simply means a pretty girl; *cool* is also used for brainy, and *crazy* for pretty. [W]
- clamour girl** *n.* Demanding female. [W]
- C. O. G.** *n.* Council of girls who maintain a disciplinary check on students who violate the rules against keeping late hours in a dormitory. [W]
- cool ; crazy ; flip ; gone ; mad ; nervous ; smooth ; swingingest ; terrific ; tremendous** *adj.* Terms denoting that somebody or something is good. [W]
- cool it ; don't tense** *v. phr.* Take it easy ; calm down ; don't be nervous. [W]
- councilmanic** *adj.* Acting like a member of the Student Council. [W]
- cove** *n.* See **big A**. [W]
- crazy** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- crazy cat** *n.* Male. [W]
- crazy distortion** *n.* Something unique. [W]
- crazy freak** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- creep** *n.* See **big zero**. [W]
- cue ball** *n.* A crew haircut. [W]
- dad** *n.* Good friend. [W]
- dar** (*damned average raiser*) *n.* Diligent student. [W]
- deadly** *adj.* Boring, in reference to a lecture, sometimes expressed as 'plain dead.' [W]
- Dear John** *n.* The brush-off from a girl. [W]
- don't tense** *v. phr.* See **cool it**. [W]
- doof** *n.* Practical joke. [W]
- drag** *n.* 1. Something dull. 'This class is a **drag**.' 2. Girl taken on a date. [W]
- dragged** *vi.* Tired. See also **bread**. [W]
- drip** *n.* See **big zero**. [W]
- end, the** *n.* See **most, the**. [W]
- fag hag** *n.* Female cigarette smoker. [W]
- feeling no pain** *adj.* Unconscious of what is going on, or drunk. See also **gassed**. [W]
- fence** *vi.* Cheat. [W]
- festivity** *n.* See **big blast**. [W]
- flip** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- bluff ; goof** *vt. or vi.* Flunk (an exam), or make a mistake of any kind. [W]
- break** *n.* Girl. See **chick**. [W]
- garbage ; slop ; swill** 1. *n.* Food. 2. *vb.* To eat: 'To garbage up.' [W]

- gassed ; ploughed ; schnockered ; way up** *adj.* Drunk. See also **feeling no pain ; skulled out of his head.** [W]
- GDI** (*god-damned independent*) *n.* A person who is independent of fraternity or sorority affiliation. The term is not deprecatory and is used by "independents" as well as by fraternity and sorority affiliates. [BF]
- get heavy** *vi.* To study. [W]
- gig** *n.* Job. 'This gig is nowhere' (this job is highly unsatisfactory). [W]
- gone** *adj.* See **cool.** [W]
- goodies ; jolly** *n.* Something good or bad (depending on the inflection of the voice). 'It's a *jolly.*' [W]
- goodies** *n.* Adult foods, drinks, clothing, or objects of art or culture that inspire childish enthusiasm. [BF]
- goof** *vi.* See **fluff.** [W]
- goon boy** *n.* See **big zero.** [W]
- got you covered** *v. phr.* I understand. [W]
- grind** *n.* Tough course or plan of study ; also used in reference to a studious person. [W]
- gross out** *vt.* Disgust, as by obscene speech or gesture. 'We managed to *gross out* nearly everyone at the dance.' [K]
- grossed out** *pp.* Disgusted ; bored or tired. 1968 fall, sign posted at Vassar College "Bored? *Grossed out?* Come to the Bistro." [K]
- gross-out** **1.** *adj.* Disgusting ; wild or orgiastic. 'That was a real *gross out* party.' **2.** *n.* Disgusting person or event. **N.B.** The provenience of *gross out* 'to disgust' is uncertain. It was common in the speech of high-school and college students by the mid-sixties in areas as diverse as Atlanta, Georgia ; Cleveland, Ohio ; and New York City. The term *gross* 'unpolished, vulgar, coarse' has been common for some time and is noted in *Webster's Second* and *Third*. Perhaps the term *gross out* arose by analogy with *sack out* 'go to bed,' *cop out* 'give up, shirk duty,' and *freak out* 'undergo a drug-induced experience, act wildly.' The term has now nominal and adjectival forms as well as the original verbal form. [K]
- gruesome twosome** *n.* Couple who go steady. [W]
- heavy** *n.* Brilliant student. [W]
- helpcat** *n.* Student assistant. [W]
- in hock with tuition** In debt to the university for a student loan. [W]
- it's bigger than both of us** Said of a love affair. [W]
- jolly** *n.* See **goodies.** [W]
- juxti** *n.* Fraternity pledge. [W]
- kick** *n.* See **big blast.** [W]
- killer** *n.* Strict instructor. [W]
- lame** *adj.* Used to describe an oaf. 'The cat is a real *lame* stud.' (That fellow is a jerk). *Stud* may also mean a ladies' man. *Lame* is the opposite of *solid*. [W]
- Later, man** An expression for 'Goodbye. See you around, etc.' After a student has taken one course in German he will change the phrase to 'Später, mann.' [W]
- like** A meaningless interjection used usually at the beginning of sentences elsewhere ; this same speech pattern has sentences ending with the word man. 'Like we was up in this freak's pad, man, and she came off real lame, *like*, because we didn't dig the TV, you know? She got hacked because we told her, *like*, that it interfered with our introspection,

- man — a real gas like.’ [W]
- living it up** *v. phr.* Having a good time. [W]
- local talent** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- loser** *n.* Something (*or* someone) hopeless. [W]
- mad** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- major in plumbing** *v. phr.* Take all pipe (easy) courses. [W]
- make out** *vi.* Do well on a date. [W]
- make-out artist** *n.* A collegian who has a way with coeds. [W]
- mattress Mary** *n.* See **beast**. [W]
- McCarthy** *n.* One who is overinvestigating and curious. [W]
- mohawk** *n.* A type of crew haircut. [W]
- monster** *n.* See **big zero**. [W]
- most, the** *n.* Something perfect. ‘It’s *the most*, to say the least.’ [W]
- nailed** *adj.* Emotionally disturbed. [W]
- neat job** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- nervous** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- New Yorker** *n.* Another variant type of crew haircut. [W]
- no oil painting** *adj.* Not beautiful. [W]
- no where** *adj.* Unsatisfactory. [W]
- not too sterling** *adj.* No good. [W]
- nothing, a** *n.* See **big zero**. [W]
- nymph** *n.* See **beast**. [W]
- pad** *n.* Apartment, room, or home (formerly shack). [W]
- party it up** *v. phr.* Have a good time. [W]
- party pooper** *n.* Someone who refuses to join in the party spirit. [W]
- phys ed major** *n.* Mannish female. [W]
- pig** *n.* See **beast**. [W]
- plain dead** *adj.* See **deadly**. [W]
- ploughed** *adj.* See **gassed**. [W]
- pod** *n.* Marijuana. ‘I got no eyes for turning on with *pod*’ (I have absolutely no use for smoking marijuana). [W]
- poop** *n.* Fraternity pledge. [W]
- professor** *n.* An *A* student. [W]
- psychoceramics major** *n.* Crackpot student. [W]
- ptomaine hall** (or **kitchen**) *n.* Student cafeteria. [W]
- put down** *v. phr.* Break off relations. ‘How come you *put* the chick *down*, man?’ (‘Why did you break off relations with that girl?’ or ‘Why did you ignore her, give her the brush-off?’) [W]
- rag drag** *n.* Journalism major. [W]
- relief man** *n.* Boy who goes without a date; also, another boy friend. [W]
- reprieve; stay of execution** *n.* Postponed exam. [W]
- river banking** *n.* The equivalent of parking (*i. e.*, necking, etc., in a parked car). The form could have been derived from the practice of parking on a long stretch of smooth bank that fronts the Olintangy River, which runs through the campus. [BF]
- round sounds** *n.* Not square: ‘Kenton’s music is *round sounds*.’ [W]
- sangy** *n.* A sandwich. The call, “Sangy man” or “Sangies and milk,” is used by vendors

- at Ohio State University who call on fraternity and sorority houses during night study-hours. [BF]
- schnocker** *adj.* See **gassed**. [W]
- sexpot** *n.* See **beast**. [W]
- shack** *n.* See **pad**. [W]
- shafted** *adj.* Used when something terrible happens to a person, or something unexpected. [W]
- shanty town** *n.* Temporary classroom buildings, often former Army barracks, used to take care of the sudden influx of students. [W]
- shook** *adj.* Emotionally upset. [W]
- short** *n.* Automobile. 'The *short* is the most, the end, bogue, too much, gone.' (That car is the utmost in cars, sharp, beautiful). [W]
- sidewalk campus** ; **streetcar university** *n.* Urban, especially downtown, college. [W]
- skulled out of his head** ; **stoned out of his skull** *v. phr.* Intoxicated to an intense degree. [W]
- slop** *n.* See **garbage**. [W]
- small scene** *n.* See **big blast**. [W]
- smooth** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- snatch** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- sneaks** *n.* Rubber-soled canvas shoes, tennis shoes. [BF]
- snob mob** *n.* Group which feels itself superior. [W]
- snow job** *n.* Deception or influence brought about by exaggerated or deceptive talk. [BF]
- solid** *adj.* A term of approval. See **lame**. [W]
- split to make a scene** *v. phr.* Go to a class or to take some other repeated course of action, such as daily practice. [W]
- stay of execution** *n.* See **reprieve**. [W]
- stoned out of his skull** *v. phr.* See **skulled out of his head**. [W]
- stud** *n.* A ladies' man ; also, a jerk. See **lame**. [W]
- student activities major** *n.* One who participates in an excess of extracurricular affairs. [W]
- stupid center** *n.* Student Center Building. [W]
- streetcar university** *n.* See **sidewalk campus**. [W]
- sweatbox** *n.* Examination room. [W]
- swill** *n.* See **garbage**. [W]
- swingingest** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- talent** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- tartar** *n.* A local term for a Wayne athlete. Also used to describe a special haircut. [W]
- tartar belle** *n.* Wayne University coed. See also **tartar**. [W]
- terrific** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- TGIF** (*Thank God it's Friday*) Used attributively to describe a party — usually a beer-drinking party — celebrating the arrival of the weekend : *TGIF party*. Sometimes verbal, as in 'We went *TGIFing* yesterday.' [BF]
- trim** *n.* See **chick**. [W]
- tremendous** *adj.* See **cool**. [W]
- troops** *n.* Fraternity brothers. [W]
- TU and STP** (*tore up and shot to pieces*) *adj.* Exhausted. [W]

- turn on** *v. phr.* Use. See **pod**. [W]
unfair sex *n.* See **chick**. [W]
wail *vi.* To do something good. [W]
way up *adj.* See **gassed**. [W]
wheels *n.* A car. [BF]
wig *vt.* To give enjoyment to. 'Beethoven *wigs* me' (I thoroughly enjoy Beethoven's music). [W]
wig out *vi.* To be highly pleased. 'He *wigged out* at the prof's gag' (He got a big belly-laugh from the professor's joke). [W]
wow *n.* Worn-out wolf. [W]
you're not getting through I don't understand you. [W]

NOTES

- 1) It is true that college slang has a subcategory that consists of the names students give their courses. (cf. Seymour 1969; Eschholz and Rosa 1970)
 Eschholz and Rosa (1970) revealed the familiar patterns in creating slang names for courses :
 - a) SHORTENING. *eg.* *Oral Interp* (Oral Interpretation of Literature), *Con Law* (Constitutional Law), etc.
 - b) ACRONYMY. *eg.* *R & R* (Reading and Research), *FOC* [fak] (Foundation of Oral Communication), etc.
 - c) RHYMING PAIR FORMATION. *eg.* *Trees and Bees* (Dentology), *Nuts and Sluts* (Abnormal Psychology), *Choke and Croak* (First Aid and Safety Education), etc.
 - d) NONRHYMING COORDINATIONS. *eg.* *Wind and Rain* (Climate), *Show and Tell* (Public Speaking), etc.
 - e) ANALOGICAL DERIVATION. *eg.* *Cowology* [*<cow+ -ology*], *zerology* ('a nothing course'), etc.
 - f) PUNNING. *eg.* *Stumping* (Introduction to Forestry), *Confusion* (Chinese Religion and Thought) [*cf.* Confucius], etc.
 - g) SYNECDOCHE. *eg.* *Clay* (Introduction to Ceramics), *Diaper Rash* (Maternal-Child Nursing), etc.
 - h) BORROWING. *eg.* *All in the Family* ((Sociology) The Family), *A & P* (Mammalian Anatomy and Physiology), *Smokey the Bear* (Forest Fire Control), etc.
- 2) My special thanks go to Miss Laurie Beltz.
- 3) We have a very interesting literature on American Indian student slang :
 Dundes Alan and C. Fayne Porter (1963), "American Indian student slang." *American Speech* 38, 270-277.

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