To find the definition and origin of the word “babelard,” it would be best to consult the Oxford English Dictionary, the accepted authority on the evolution of the English language, with more than half a million headwords defined.

But you won’t find “broughten” anywhere in that massive 20-volume set. For that, you have to switch on your computer, and head to www.urbandictionary.com, the ultimate pop lexicon Web site created by Aaron Peckham (CSC B.S., M.S. ’05) in 1999.

“I started it in my freshman year as a joke – as a parody of dictionary.com,” says the lanky, bespectacled 24-year-old.

It looked exactly like it, but there were major differences. Most notably, urbandictionary.com defined slang words and phrases written by Peckham and some friends.

The dictionary’s irreverent, hip tone apparently struck a chord with young people everywhere, and its popularity spread “hecka” fast. Today the site gets some 100,000 daily visitors, many of whom also contribute words, definitions and opinions.

The dictionary’s content has surged from its original 150 submissions to 333,000 words and 600,000 definitions.

Many words have numerous definitions. Check out “emo” and its more than 620.

More than a mere slang dictionary, Peckham calls urbandictionary.com “a living catalog of human interaction and popular culture written by normal, everyday people.” The authors are the people who actually use the words; they write their personal points of view. That gives the site authenticity, Peckham says. “And their writing is fascinating.”

Cal Poly English Professor John
WHAT BEGAN AS A ONE-MAN SHOP NOW HAS SEVERAL THOUSAND VOLUNTEER EDITORS LOOKING AT 1,500 INCOMING DEFINITIONS A DAY.

Peckham points out that his dictionary also defines such everyday words as "conservative," "woman," "vegetarian" and "liberal." Just don't expect to see the usual definitions there. "They're very opinionated," he warns.

Peckham has written guidelines to help the editors maintain the site's purpose of recording today's language. And while he calls the site's best content "funny, insightful and relevant to everyday life," much of its content is not "G" rated.

"We allow racial and sexual slurs, but reject racist and sexist entries. Entries can document discrimination but not endorse it," he explains. "People use slurs in everyday speech, so they should be published."

Peckham spends most of his time on the site, yet he still managed to compile material for his latest venture, a book titled *Urban Dictionary: Fularious Street Slang Defined*. The newly released book contains about 2,000 of the site's "funniest, truest definitions."

Peckham now lives in San Francisco and works at Google as a software engineer. "I love the company's mission: 'To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.' I think my projects have had a lot in common with that."

"Fo shizzle."