April 27, 2012

Dear Member of the Class of 2016:

On behalf of the Department of Literature and the College Writing Program, we welcome you to American University. To set the stage for your first semester here at AU, we have chosen a book that we call our “community text” for you to read before you arrive in August. You and your classmates will discuss the book and write about it in your first-semester College Writing or Honors English class. The College Writing Program and the Campus Store will also sponsor an essay contest to honor the best writing inspired by the community text.

We’re delighted to announce this year’s choice: Seamus McGraw’s *The End of Country*. We will bring Mr. McGraw to campus this fall for the fifteenth annual Writer as Witness Colloquium on **Wednesday, September 5**, at 8:00 p.m. in Bender Arena. He will address the American University community and meet with students and faculty to discuss the book.

In *The End of Country*, Seamus McGraw considers the potential profits and inevitable risks in natural gas drilling in rural northeast Pennsylvania. Through investigation, story-telling, and personal accounts, McGraw contributes to the complex conversation about hydrofracking and national energy independence. McGraw has written for numerous national publications including *The New York Times*, *Reader’s Digest* and *Spin*. He was awarded the 2011 Golden Quill Award for Enterprise/Investigative Series by the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania for his work in the *Pittsburgh Quarterly*. He has also received a Freedom of Information Award from the Associated Press Managing Editors, as well as honors from the Casey Foundation and the Society of Professional Journalists.

*The Humanist* credits McGraw for “bring[ing] us to the front lines of the U.S. energy revolution to deliver an honest and humbling account that could hardly possess greater relevance.” In a starred review, *Booklist* applauds McGraw’s “impressively detailed, highly engaging look at issues of energy policy, economics, and sociology.” Author Tom Zoellner praises McGraw’s ability to go “beyond the easy stereotypes of greedy promoters preying on farmers and gives us the unvarnished truth about a twenty-first-century energy rush in a place we never expected it.” Additionally, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. proclaims, “Deeply personal, sometimes moving, sometimes funny, *The End of Country* lays out the promises and the perils faced not just by the people of one small Pennsylvania town but by our whole nation.”

The American University Campus Store is offering *The End of Country* at a discount. You may order the book directly through the Campus Store website: [www.american.bkstr.com](http://www.american.bkstr.com). Copies will also be available for purchase at the Campus Store during all of the New Student Orientations, when you’ll have your first opportunity to talk with classmates about *The End of Country*. You will find additional resources on this website prepared by our colleagues in AU’s library: [http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/collegewriting](http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/collegewriting).
As you read this summer, think about possible questions for the author to address during the September Colloquium. You may email questions or comments to: cwp@american.edu. You also will have the chance to ask your questions directly at the Writer as Witness Colloquium on September 5. We look forward to meeting you there to hear your responses to the provocative questions raised by Seamus McGraw’s work. Enjoy the rest of your summer. And welcome to AU!

Cordially,

[Signature]

Keith Leonard, Chair
Department of Literature

[Signature]

John Hyman, Director
College Writing Program