Exploring Civic Leadership among Young Tunisians: Inviting Despair, Creating Hope
Sarah Kincaid, George Mason University

This proposal is a submission for a twenty minute individual presentation on how civicly engaged youth in Tunisia are approaching collaboration with non-civicly engaged youth to promote inclusivity and greater levels of civic participation. This presentation is based on qualitative research conducted in Tunis, Tunisia during Summer of 2015 with 16 youth, under the age of 35. This presentation will explore youth attitudes on civic engagement and barriers to participation in post-authoritarian Tunisia such as despair, suspicion, lack of confidence in democracy, and few opportunities for meaningful engagement. I will explore how civicly engaged youth are addressing these barriers by inviting their non-civicly engaged peers to interactive, community events where participants create shared meaning around communal experiences. I will also explore how civicly engaged youth utilize informal social spaces such as coffee shops, universities, and social media sites to stir a sense of hope and pride in activism. This research provides a rich snapshot of civicly and non-civicly engaged youth who comprise 51% of Tunisia’s population and led the 2011 revolution. These findings bring into question labels such as “politically inactive” and “potential ISIS fighters” that are employed in the dominant narrative on Tunisian youth. Finally, this research suggests that Tunisian youth wield a powerful social imaginary that will continue to play a critical role in the transformation of civic and social norms. This research was funded in part by the Chantal Paydar Foundation.