Dr. Julie Posselt is an Assistant Professor of higher education in the USC Rossier School of Education and a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation postdoctoral research fellow. Rooted in sociological and organizational theory, her research program examines institutionalized inequalities in higher education and organizational efforts aimed at reducing inequities and encouraging diversity. She focuses on selective sectors of higher education—graduate education, STEM fields, and elite undergraduate institutions—where longstanding practices and cultural norms are being negotiated to better identify talent and educate students in a changing society. Posselt is author of the book *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping* (2016, Harvard University Press), which is based on an award-winning ethnographic study of faculty judgment in 10 highly ranked doctoral programs in three universities. Her other current work includes a multi-institutional comparative case study, funded by the Spencer Foundation, of organizational conditions and institutional practices in highly-ranked STEM graduate programs that have been successful enrolling and graduating women and students of color.

Posselt also holds a National Academy of Education postdoctoral fellowship for the first national study of graduate student mental health. This project identifies factors associated with depression and anxiety; investigates the roles of discrimination, competitiveness, and faculty support in graduate student wellbeing; and measures disparities within and across academic disciplines. She has published or has forthcoming research in the *American Educational Research Journal, Research in Higher Education, Journal of Higher Education, Teachers College Record, Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, among others. She is a member of the *Journal of Higher Education*’s editorial review board.

See the description of her talks on the next page.
Trust Networks: A New Perspective on Pedigree and the Ambiguities of Admissions

Thursday, September 7, 1:30-3:00pm
133F College of Education

Attending a selective college or university is one of the three strongest predictors of admission to graduate programs; however, access to these institutions is stratified by race, socioeconomic status, and gender. Broadening participation in graduate education and the professoriate requires a critical look at default judgments of college quality, which starts with understanding how judgments of pedigree are currently formed. In this talk, based on a paper in press with Review of Higher Education, Posselt will 1) discuss trust as a mechanism of social judgment, 2) propose individual and institutionalized trust networks as a framework for understanding preference for elite pedigrees, and 3) present evidence from qualitative research that trust networks enable faculty to invest in the future of PhD applicants whose relative merits are difficult to determine. She will close by highlighting selected efforts to broaden the trust networks affecting access to graduate education and the professoriate.

Inclusive Graduate Education: Linking Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention Practices for Equitable Access and Wellbeing

Department of Physics and Astronomy
Thursday, Sept 7, 4:10pm, Location TBA

Gender and racial inequities in PhD enrollment and attainment are usually thought about as student-level problems with student-level solutions. New strategies for reducing inequalities are revealed, however, by placing faculty work at the center of analysis. In this colloquium, Posselt will present results of her research on doctoral admissions decision making, published in the book Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping (Harvard Univ. Press, 2016), case studies of high-diversity STEM PhD programs, as well as her findings from the first national study of graduate student mental health. Through her findings, Posselt links admissions, recruitment, and retention as a system of faculty practices. Inequitable access to and wellbeing in graduate education, she argues, can be productively reframed as a function of inherited approaches to evaluating and interacting with students—cultural qualities of graduate education that often go unexamined. Revisiting everyday assumptions and practices, as well as making collective effort toward common goals, therefore both hold potential to improve outcomes for all students.