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The role of generation status and acculturation in the academic achievement of Latina/o college students

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Of the 2.9 million Latinas/o students (17% of all high school students in the U.S.) enrolled in secondary education, only 53.2% of these students are expected to graduate from high school, and only 28.2% of these graduates were expected to attend higher education. In hopes of promoting the college success of Latina/o students, researchers have identified factors related to their educational attrition rate in secondary and college education. Although acculturation is widely viewed as a critical factor, research has yielded inconsistent findings about its role in Latinas/o student adjustment. Some studies have suggested that integration is associated with better academic outcomes whereas others support the importance of assimilation. One potential explanation for the conflicting findings regarding optimal acculturation patterns is that most prior research has failed to consider the role of generational status. For instance, one recent study found that identifying as bicultural (having a strong sense of both their ethnic identity and their American identity) was especially important for first and second generation students. In the present study, we investigated the interrelationships among acculturation, generation status, college self-efficacy, and achievement in a sample of 472 (268 female, 204 male) Mexican American college students. We hypothesized that acculturation would interact with generation status to determine student outcomes. Specifically, we expected strong Mexican and Anglo Orientation to be most beneficial in determining GPA for first generation students. Using hierarchical linear regression we found evidence of an interaction between generation status and Mexican Orientation but not Anglo Orientation. The findings help expand the limited research on the impact of generational status on college achievement in Mexican American students. Additionally, the discussion will focus on implications for evolving theories intended to explain the academic achievement and attrition among Latino/a students.