Introduction and objectives.

Taking into account the very important role of the mentoring programs in the field of the University Education, in the present academic year 2006 – 2007, a Student Mentor Program has been organized by the first time in the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Seville, Spain.

It has been designed in order to yield with two main objectives: (I) to be a useful way of helping first-year students (the partners) adjust to their new environment and (II) to develop several social tasks in senior students (the mentors).

Program structure.

Considering these objectives, and taking in mind the fact that the problems that first-year students present are different in comparison with the senior student’s ones, this program has been designed considering the following three important elements:

1. FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS. These students are usually reticent to contact with the professors or just do not know how to access them. Usually, these new students are absent-minded and do not know how to organize their academical curricula or just how to access to useful administrative or social information.

2. With this situation, the main idea of the present program is that these students will be directly mentored by MENTOR STUDENTS, people well experimented in the university field, students of the two last years of the degree who have useful knowledge about very different aspects related to the university and who, usually, first-year students trust in. These mentor students can provide relevant and useful information to the new students during their early years at the university. They also can be able to direct the first-year students to appropriate other individuals. Often the greatest assistance a mentor student can provide (according to the mentor professor guidance) is simply the identification of which staff one should approach for which task. They should feel like an advisor, someone on your side; loyal, interested, trusted and most importantly, experienced in areas that you may not be.

3. The third pillar of this program is the MENTOR PROFESSOR. These professors must be very implied in the Faculty life, because they must control the evolution of the mentor students and the partners, and must make sure that the information provided by mentor students is appropriate.

It is obvious that the program success depends on these three pillars all taking an active role in the acclimation process.
In all the cases, mentors should treat all interactions and discussions in confidence. There is no evaluation or assessment of the partners or of the mentor students on the part of the mentor professor, only supportive guidance and constructive feedback.

For the indicated purposes, the present program is based on a deliberate, conscious and voluntary relationship, and it must be supported by the University. In this sense, the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Seville has offered this program as an activity of free configuration credits, and has been extended for the next academic year.

The outcome of this relationship is expected to benefit all parts in the relationship, as indicated below:

Benefits for the partners. First-year students will receive a jump-start for adjusting to their new university studying requirements, organizing their curriculum activities, meeting new people and navigating the University by linking them with experienced students from their own Faculty. Mentor students ensure that new students are aware of campus support services and how to access them. They are available to answer questions, provide support and guidance and share their experiences about the University, including social and administrative information.

Benefits for the mentor students. The main benefit for these students is to develop several social competencies related to the interpersonal relationships that are not usually developed in scientific-technical degrees, as it is the Pharmacy Degree. In this sense, they develop competencies of organizing characteristics, personal assessment as well as an important leader role. Furthermore, mentor students have a more complete knowledge about the Pharmacy Degree because of their assessment activities related to the curricular route of their partners, always supported by the mentor professor. Moreover, these mentor students realize several reports about the evolution of their partners, so they are in the obligation of establishing reasonable conclusions, with the less possible charge of intuitive considerations.

Benefits for the mentor professors. This program implies a more important implication of the professors of the Faculty, as they must have a more global vision of the Pharmacy Degree.

Therefore, the present Student Mentor Program is intended to provide benefits to the community within which the mentoring takes place.

Development of the program.

The several activities of the program take place on small groups. The proposed ratio is 1 mentor student / 4 partners and 1 mentor professor / 2 mentor students. Nevertheless, these ratios have been modified as a function of the number of students interested in the program.

All first-year students can access to this program, but they must participate in an active manner if they want to continue in the mentoring program. This situation must be clearly indicated in the reports supported by the mentor students.

Students interested in acting as mentors student must be matriculated either in the last or the penultimate level of the degree, and must demonstrate a clear interest in a properly development of their curricular trajectory.

Both mentor students and mentor professors have received professional information from experts of the
University of Seville, at the Faculty of Pharmacy, before starting the mentoring program. This information has included both methodological considerations related to mentoring programs as well as technological support to access to information related to the University of Seville.

Several fact files have been elaborated in order to protocol the activities of first-year students, mentor students and mentor professors. This has allowed obtaining information and conclusions in a more effective manner.

Moreover, a minimum number of meetings among the several parts has been established, although there have been meetings by electronic or telecommunication means.

Finally, different questionnaires for students (partners and mentors) as well as for professors have been elaborated, with the idea of having information about the personal opinion of all the parts implied in the program.

**Results and conclusions.**

The preliminary results obtained indicate that the main objectives have been yielded.

Most of the suggestions formulated by the mentor students, assessed by their mentor professor in every moment, have been accepted by their first-year students. This has implied better academic result for the last ones. It has been detected some personal problems related to the methodology of studying which has been in one case directed to the pertinent office of the University of Seville.

Mentor students have been very implied in the program. In fact, most of them are interested in being included again in the mentoring program for the next academic year, even though they cannot receive more free configuration credits in relation to this activity.

In relation to the mentor professors, all of them have expressed a very positive evaluation of their mentor students, indicating a very high degree of implication in the program. They all have also expressed their interest in continuing in this Mentor Student Program.

As a conclusion, it can be indicated that this mentoring program, in which mentor students are involved, allows several advantages not only for the first-year students, but also for senior students that act as mentor students, as well as for mentor professors.