One of the least expected and most exciting features of Williams' new Sawyer Library is the Center for Educational Technology, which occupies half of the second floor.

“The CET provides a huge expansion in engagement between the Office for Information Technology and the community,” says Jonathan Morgan-Leamon, director of instructional technology. “Most services that were previously available in Jesup Hall are now available in both places—with many additional resources at the CET.”

The new recording studio is a case in point. Faculty across disciplines will have a sound-controlled space in which to conduct remote telephone interviews or prepare video-based teaching materials and podcasts. Students can film a video for a class project, record a session with their a cappella group or a music audition piece for graduate school applications. “The collective imagination of our students, faculty, and staff will undoubtedly come up with innumerable creative uses for the space,” says chief technology officer Dinny Taylor.

Another CET feature is a videoconference room that supports room-to-room (as opposed to Skype-like person-to-person) visual communication. Special lighting and microphones allow for easily controlled, high-quality audio and visual communication so that entire class groups can gather here to communicate with others across the state or around the world, seeing one another and the lecture materials in each location.

Then there’s “the maker space,” which currently boasts a 3D printer and scanner, and space to support students developing their visualization and rendering skills. Plans are in the works to add small technology tools that make interactive environments more accessible, like Arduinos or Raspberry Pis. “Student organizations that can benefit from production will use this space, as will faculty creating teaching and visualization tools,” says Leamon, adding that the space supports what Williams design engineer and model maker Michael Taylor does in his workshop and classes. “We can provide 3D printing as a service, such as when a faculty member needs a model of a molecule, or after-hours experimentation, if a student wants to learn how to model and then print a custom piece for her favorite game.” Students will staff the space and teach people how to use the equipment—equipment that Leamon describes as “allowing us to take digital creations and make them real.”

The CET also has classrooms, workstations, and conference rooms, each equipped with education-enhancing technology. Take the large screen that can connect multiple laptops at a time in each conference room: “Up to four people can work simultaneously at their own screens,” says Leamon, “doing research, writing text, taking notes—and then instantly share their work with the others in the room. This allows more fluid collaboration in student discussions or tutorial sessions.”

There’s one room in the CET that defies easy description. “If I could name it,” says Leamon, “I’d call it the Brainstorming Room.” It has a zero-throw projector, which projects from directly above the screen so that it doesn’t cast a shadow, and multiple white boards on which more than one person can write—and record—ideas at the same time. This room encapsulates CET’s main goal: to support students and faculty in the classroom and beyond, through collaboration and with the use of state-of-the-art technology.

“This entire space was planned to allow us to support learning and teaching,” Leamon says. “While many people may first visit the CET—with its student-staffed help desk—when they’re having technology problems, it’s sure to be the first visit of many.”