Recently I was given the privilege of having a tour of the new James B. Hunt Jr. Library while it is still in construction. The library is slated to open later this year, but it is not your traditional library. Hunt Library is being built from the ground up as a next generation technology-driven library.

The first thing you will notice as soon as you enter the library from the second floor will be the Apple-like checkout center and the large screens above the circulation desk. The checkout center will be a showcase for all the technological gadgets that can be checked out at the library. This is a great place to display new games and systems as they come out on the market.

The screens above the circulation desk are a series of networked smart display screens that are capable of super high resolutions and are controlled by servers in the lower level of the library. These networked screens are actually in many different locations throughout the library. Some of these screens can even be manipulated via a web application by library users. The screens are capable of being used as single large displays with super high resolution or being split into multiple screens with lower resolution for each and there are a few screens that even have touch input.

One such smart screen appears in the new video game research area that will hold a prominent place on the third floor of the new library. The new gaming research area will have a large screen and space for eight consoles to be attached; four current generation consoles and four legacy consoles. The game area is easily viewable from both the second and third floors, but is encased in smart glass that can become opaque at the touch of a button, both to control the ambient light levels in the room and to provide a little privacy while people play games there. Having such a prominent place in the library set aside for a games-specific showcase surely will increase interest in games and game research.

Another screen appears in the immersion theatre. The immersion theatre appears on the second floor next to the circulation desk and consists of a curved screen and surround sound system. It is made such that you can stand in the center of the curve and feel immersed in what you are looking at on screen.
By now you are probably wondering how the sound works with all of these screens going on at once. Well, the designers have already thought of this problem too. Any screen that does not already have speakers hooked to it will have the sound broadcast via short wave FM radio. You can listen to the sound associated with any screen simply by tuning your personal radio to the right station. If you do not have a FM radio, you can check one out at the circulation desk.

My two favorite rooms in the new library are on the fourth floor and actually have nothing directly to do with video games. The first room has special paint on three walls that allow projectors to display on them. This room will also be fitted with a theatre style lighting system. I imagine that this room will be popular with theater students, but also usable for gaming students who want to bring their work into the real world. The second room was presented as a collaboration room, but as soon as I saw it the only thing I could think about was the holodeck from Star Trek. The room has the same projector paint as the first room, but has it on all walls and the floor. The room is also divided by movable walls that have whiteboards on both sides, so they can have projectors on them as well. There is also a lighting system in this room as well. I can easily see someone with an imaginative mind turning this room into an interactive wonderland. In fact, during the tour, we were told that there is a group that is already planning on using the room to recreate an old chapel the way it was back in the 18th century. This includes both sights and sounds.

I think that the new library has great potential and can be a great asset for those willing to put forth the effort and use the new technologies provided. I am looking forward to what uses students will come up with.