Nestled between the admissions building and the Campus Center, most students were completely unaware of the existence of the Ceramics Studio, let alone the fact that William & Mary even offered a Ceramics Class. The ceramics studio housed three outdoor kilns as well as a plethora of student pieces. Although Ceramics was not a requirement for the completion of an art major, many chose to use it towards reaching the forty credit minimum necessary to fulfill the major. Art majors could choose a focus in two-dimensional art, three-dimensional art, or print-making, but this course allowed students to expand their repertoires beyond their area of expertise.

Ceramics was made of two introductory classes, one involving use of the pottery wheel and the other involving crafting pieces by hand. “Each class is three hours long and throwing, handbuilding and advanced ceramics are offered. Throwing teaches technique on the wheel, while handbuilding helps students discover other various techniques of building ceramics,” sophomore Ashley Fryer said. These courses allowed students to create a variety of items, from bowls and vases to hand-crafted ceramic figurines.

Often, the amount of effort that went into creating ceramic pieces remained unnoticed. “First we mix the clay, then throw it. Then it dries, and we fire it in a bisque kiln. After that, we glaze it and fire it in the outside kilns which are bigger and reach a higher temperature than the first two. Only after all these steps are completed, is a piece ready for use,” Fryer said.

Although this class required more than just the three hours of scheduled time, many students acknowledged the rich tradition they became a part of. “I really enjoy the class, which is good, since it’s a big time commitment outside of class,” Fryer said. “Whenever I go to the studio I expect to spend at least two or three hours there - much more if a project is due. I feel like there is a lot of satisfaction in the whole process. When I use a teapot or cup I’ve made, I know that it started from bags of dust and water, and I’ve been there for the whole process,” Fryer said.

Ceramics allowed both art majors and those who were simply curious about ceramics to create something original and learn about the rich historical tradition of the ceramic-making process. Ceramics classes provided an outlet for students to ‘throw’ in the new using old techniques to create a unique combination of modernity and tradition.