Days

Seconds

Minutes

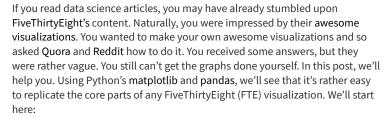
Plans

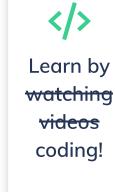
Start Free



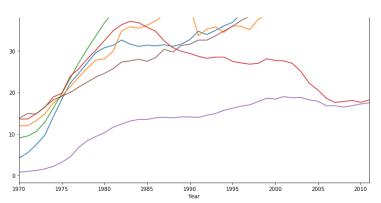
# How to Generate FiveThirtyEight Graphs in Python



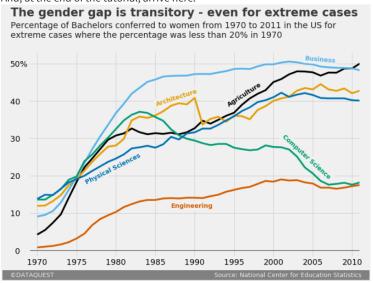








And, at the end of the tutorial, arrive here:



To follow along, you'll need at least some basic knowledge of Python. If you know what's the difference between methods and attributes, then you're good to go.

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### Introducing the dataset

We'll work with data describing the percentages of Bachelors conferred to women in the US from 1970 to 2011. We'll use a dataset

yourself some time, you can skip downloading the file, and just pass in the direct link to pandas'  $read\_csv()$  function. In the following code cell, we:

- Import the pandas module.
- Assign the direct link toward the dataset as a string to a variable named direct link.
- Read in the data by using read\_csv(), and assign the content to women\_majors.
- Print information about the dataset by using the info() method.
   We're looking for the number of rows and columns, and checking for null values at the same time.
- Show the first five rows to understand better the structure of the dataset by using the head() method.

```
import pandas as pd
direct_link = 'http://www.randalolson.com/wp-content/uploads
women_majors = pd.read_csv(direct_link)
print(women_majors.info())
women_majors.head()
```

### googleAnalyticsR

FEBRUARY 24, 2021

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MAY 4, 2020

How to Learn Data Science (Step-By-Step) in 2020

0 2	0 4	4 0	2 4
Days	Hours	Minutes	Seconds

**START FREE** →

Agriculture	42	non-null	float64
Architecture	42	non-null	float64
Art and Performance	42	non-null	float64
Biology	42	non-null	float64
Business	42	non-null	float64
Communications and Journalism	42	non-null	float64
Computer Science	42	non-null	float64
Education	42	non-null	float64
Engineering	42	non-null	float64
English	42	non-null	float64
Foreign Languages	42	non-null	float64
Health Professions	42	non-null	float64
Math and Statistics	42	non-null	float64
Physical Sciences	42	non-null	float64
Psychology	42	non-null	float64
Public Administration	42	non-null	float64
Social Sciences and History	42	non-null	float64
1			

dtypes: float64(17), int64(1)

memory usage: 6.0 KB

None

	Year	Agriculture	Architecture	Art and Performance	Biology	Business	Communi and Jou
0	1970	4.229798	11.921005	59.7	29.088363	9.064439	35.3
1	1971	5.452797	12.003106	59.9	29.394403	9.503187	35.5
2	1972	7.420710	13.214594	60.4	29.810221	10.558962	36.6
3	1973	9.653602	14.791613	60.2	31.147915	12.804602	38.4
4	1974	14.074623	17.444688	61.9	32.996183	16.204850	40.5

### Besides the

Year column, every other column name indicates the subject of a Bachelor degree. Every datapoint in the Bachelor columns represents the percentage of Bachelor degrees conferred to women. Thus, every 2020 (Are They Worth It?)

Hours

Days

Seconds

Minutes

women\_majors.tatt(/

	Year	Agriculture	Architecture	Art and Performance	Biology	Business	Commur and Joi
37	2007	47.605026	43.100459	61.4	59.411993	49.000459	62.5
38	2008	47.570834	42.711730	60.7	59.305765	48.888027	62.4
39	2009	48.667224	43.348921	61.0	58.489583	48.840474	62.8
40	2010	48.730042	42.066721	61.3	59.010255	48.757988	62.5
41	2011	50.037182	42.773438	61.2	58.742397	48.180418	62.2

# The context of our FiveThirtyEight graph

Almost every FTE graph is part of an article. The graphs complement the text by illustrating a little story, or an interesting idea. We'll need to be mindful of this while replicating our FTE graph. To avoid digressing from our main task in this tutorial, let's just pretend we've already written most of an article about the evolution of gender disparity in US education. We now need to create a graph to help readers visualize the evolution of gender disparity for Bachelors where the situation was really bad for women in 1970. We've already set a threshold of 20%, and now we want to graph the evolution for every Bachelor where the percentage of women graduates was less than 20% in 1970. Let's first identify those specific Bachelors. In the following code cell, we will:

• Use .loc, a label-based indexer, to:

than 20; the Year field will be checked as well, but will obviously not be included because 1970 is much greater than 20.

• Assign the resulting content to under\_20.

```
under_20 = women_majors.loc[0, women_majors.loc[0] < 20]
under_20</pre>
```

Agriculture 4.229798
Architecture 11.921005
Business 9.064439
Computer Science 13.600000
Engineering 0.800000
Physical Sciences 13.800000

Name: 0, dtype: float64

# Using matplotlib's default style

Let's begin working on our graph. We'll first take a peek at what we can build by default. In the following code block, we will:

- Run the Jupyter magic %matplotlib to enable Jupyter and matplotlib work together effectively, and add inline to have our graphs displayed inside the notebook.
- Plot the graph by using the plot() method on women\_majors.
   We pass in to plot() the following parameters:

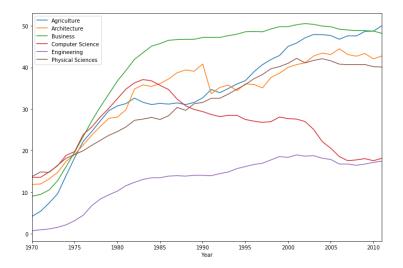
Days

Hours

- figsize sets the size of the figure as a tuple with the format (width, height) in inches.
- Assign the plot object to a variable named under\_20\_graph, and print its type to show that pandas uses matplotlib objects under the hood.

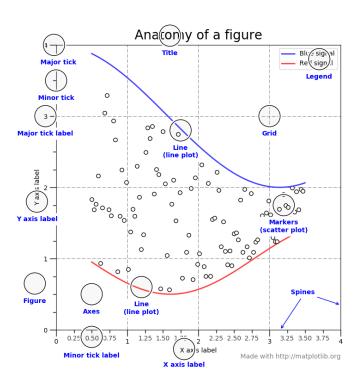
```
under_20_graph = women_majors.plot(x = 'Year', y = under_20
print('Type:', type(under_20_graph))
```

Type: <class 'matplotlib.axes.\_subplots.AxesSubplot'>



### Using matplotlib's fivethirtyeight style

The graph above has certain characteristics, like the width and color of the spines, the font size of the y-axis label, the absence of a grid, etc. All of these characteristics make up matplotlib's default style. As



Source: Matplotlib.org

Besides the default style, matplotlib comes with several built-in styles that we can use readily. To see a list of the available styles, we will:

- Import the matplotlib.style module under the name style.
- Explore the content of matplotlib.style.available (a predefined variable of this module), which contains a list of all the available in-built styles.

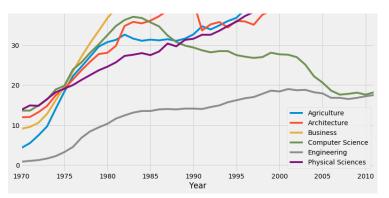
import matplotlib.style as style
style.available

```
'seaborn-white',
'dark_background',
'seaborn-notebook',
'seaborn-darkgrid',
'grayscale',
'seaborn-paper',
'seaborn-talk',
'seaborn-bright',
'classic',
'seaborn-colorblind',
'seaborn-ticks',
'ggplot',
'seaborn',
'_classic_test',
'fivethirtyeight',
'seaborn-dark-palette',
'seaborn-dark',
'seaborn-whitegrid',
'seaborn-pastel',
'seaborn-poster']
```

You might have already observed that there's a built-in style called

fivethirtyeight. Let's use this style, and see where that leads. For that, we'll use the aptly named use() function from the same matplotlib.style module (which we imported under the name style). Then we'll generate our graph using the same code as earlier.

```
style.use('fivethirtyeight')
women_majors.plot(x = 'Year', y = under_20.index, figsize =
```

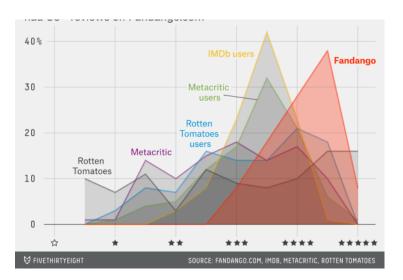


Wow, that's a major change! With respect to our first graph, we can see that this one has a different background color, it has grid lines, there are no spines whatsoever, the weight and the font size of the major tick labels are different, etc. You can read a technical description of the fivethirtyeight style here – it should also give you a good idea about what code runs under the hood when we use this style. The author of the style sheet, Cameron David-Pilon, discusses some of the characteristics here.

# The limitations of matplotlib's fivethirtyeight style

All in all, using the

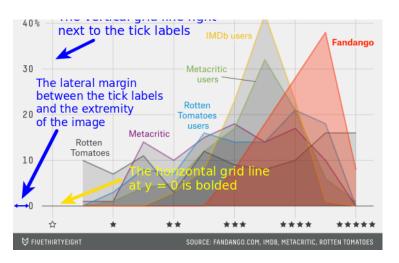
fivethirtyeight style clearly brings us much closer to our goal. Nonetheless, there's still a lot left to do. Let's examine a simple FTE



Source: FiveThirtyEight

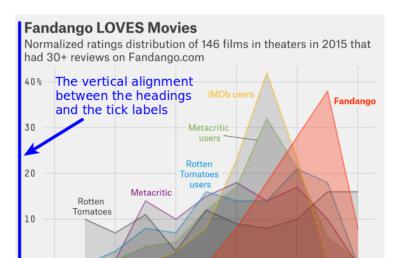
By comparing the above graph with what we've made so far, we can see that we still need to:

- Add a title and a subtitle.
- Remove the block-style legend, and add labels near the relevant plot lines. We'll also have to make the grid lines transparent around these labels.
- Add a signature bottom bar which mentions the author of the graph and the source of the data.
- Add a couple of other small adjustments:
  - increase the font size of the tick labels;
  - add a "%" symbol to one of the major tick labels of the y-axis;
  - remove the x-axis label;
  - bold the horizontal grid line at y = 0;
  - add an extra grid line next to the tick labels of the y-axis;
  - increase the lateral margins of the figure.



Source: FiveThirtyEight

To minimize the time spent with generating the graph, it's important to avoid beginning adding the title, the subtitle, or any other text snippet. In matplotlib, a text snippet is positioned by specifying the x and y coordinates, as we'll see in some of the sections below. To replicate in detail the FTE graph above, notice that we'll have to align vertically the tick labels of the y-axis with the title and the subtitle. We want to avoid a situation where we have the vertical alignment we want, lost it by increasing the font size of the tick labels, and then have to change the position of the title and subtitle again.



Days

Seconds

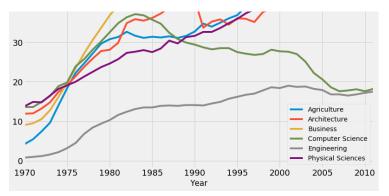
Minutes

### Customizing the tick labels

We'll start by increasing the font size of the tick labels. In the following code cell, we:

- Plot the graph using the same code as earlier, and assign the
  resulting object to fte\_graph. Assigning to a variable allows us
  to repeatedly and easily apply methods on the object, or access
  its attributes.
- Increase the font size of all the major tick labels using the tick\_params() method with the following parameters:
  - axis specifies the axis that the tick labels we want to modify belong to; here we want to modify the tick labels of both axes;
  - which indicates what tick labels to be affected (the major or the minor ones; see the legend shown earlier if you don't know the difference);
  - labelsize sets the font size of the tick labels.

```
fte_graph = women_majors.plot(x = 'Year', y = under_20.inde>
fte_graph.tick_params(axis = 'both', which = 'major', labels
```



You may have noticed that we didn't use

style.use('fivethirtyeight') this time. That's because the preference for any matplotlib style becomes global once it's first declared in our code. We've set the style earlier as

fivethirtyeight, and from there on all subsequent graphs inherit this style. If for some reason you want to return to the default state, just run style.use('default'). We'll now build upon our previous changes by making a few adjustments to the tick labels of the y-axis:

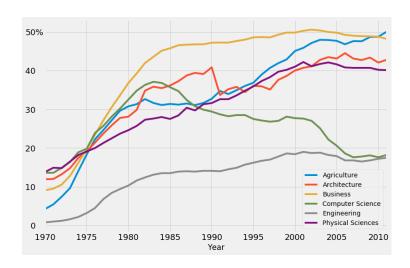
- We add a "%" symbol to 50, the highest visible tick label of the yaxis.
- We also add a few whitespace characters after the other visible labels to align them elegantly with the new "50%" label.

To make these changes to the tick labels of the y-axis, we'll use the

set\_yticklabels() method along with the label parameter. As you can deduce from the code below, this parameter can take in a list of mixed data types, and doesn't require any fixed number of labels to be passed in.

# Customizing the tick labels of the y-axis fte\_graph.set\_y1
print('The tick labels of the y-axis:', fte\_graph.get\_yticks

The tick labels of the y-axis: [-10. 0. 10. 20. 30. 40



# Bolding the horizontal line at y = 0

We will now bold the horizontal line where the y-coordinate is 0. For that, we'll use the

axhline() method to add a new horizontal grid line, and cover the existing one. The parameters we use for axhline() are:

- y specifies the y-coordinate of the horizontal line;
- color indicates the color of the line;
- linewidth sets the width of the line.

0 2

Days

Seconds

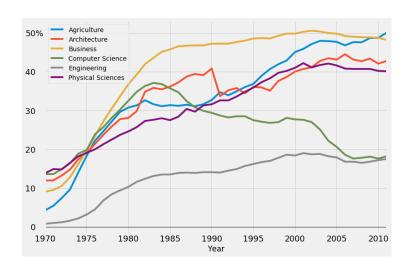
Minutes

### #

### # The previous code

### # Generate a bolded horizontal line at y = 0

fte\_graph.axhline(y = 0, color = 'black', linewidth = 1.3, a



### Add an extra vertical line

As we mentioned earlier, we have to add another vertical grid line in the immediate vicinity of the tick labels of the y-axis. For that, we simply tweak the range of the values of the x-axis. Increasing the range's left limit will result in the extra vertical grid line we want. Below, we use the

### set vlim() method with the self-evolunatory parameters left

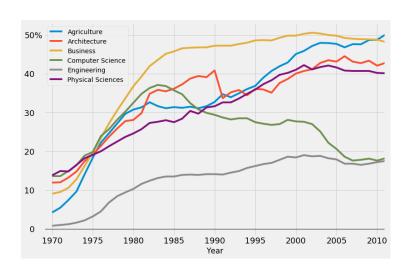
Days

Seconds

Minutes

```
fte_graph.set_yticklabels(labels = [-10, '0 ', '10 ', '2
fte_graph.axhline(y = 0, color = 'black', linewidth = 1.3, a
```

# Add an extra vertical line by tweaking the range of the x-fte\_graph.set\_xlim(left = 1969, right = 2011)

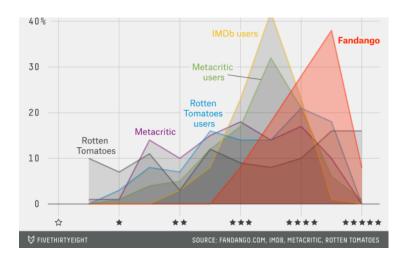


### Generating a signature bar

The signature bar of the example FTE graph presented above has a few obvious characteristics:

- It's positioned at the bottom of the graph.
- The author's name is located on the left side of the signature bar.
- The source of the data is mentioned on the right side of the signature bar.
- The text has a light grey color (the same as the background color of the graph), and a dark grey background.

**START FREE** →



The image is posted again so you don't have to scroll back. Source: FiveThirtyEight

It may seem difficult to add such a signature bar, but with a little ingenuity we can get it done quite easily. We'll add a single snippet of text, give it a light grey color, and a background color of dark grey. We'll write both the author's name and the source in a single text snippet, but we'll space out these two such that one ends up on the far left side, and the other on the far right. The nice thing is that the whitespace characters will get a dark grey background as well, which will create the effect of a signature bar. We'll also use some white space characters to align the author's name and the name of the source, as you'll be able to see in the next code block. This is also a good moment to remove the label of the x-axis. This way, we can get a better visual sense of how the signature bar fits in the overall scheme of the graph. In the next code cell, we'll build up on what we've done so far, and we will:

Remove the label of the x-axis by passing in a False value to the set\_visible() method we apply to the object
 fte\_graph.xaxis.label. Think of it this way: we access the
 xaxis attribute of fte\_graph, and then we access the label
 attribute of fte\_graph.xaxis. Then we finally apply

- x specifies the x-coordinate of the text;
- y specifies the y-coordinate of the text;
- s indicates the text to be added;
- fontsize sets the size of the text;
- color specifies the color of the text; the format of the value we use below is hexadecimal; we use this format to match exactly the background color of the entire graph (as specified in the code of the fivethirtyeight style);
- backgroundcolor sets the background color of the text snippet.

### # The previous code

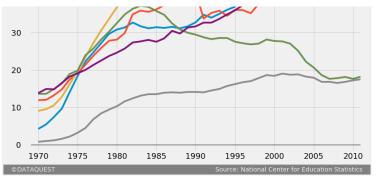
```
fte_graph = women_majors.plot(x = 'Year', y = under_20.inde)
fte_graph.tick_params(axis = 'both', which = 'major', labels
fte_graph.set_yticklabels(labels = [-10, '0 ', '10 ', '2
fte_graph.axhline(y = 0, color = 'black', linewidth = 1.3, a
fte_graph.set_xlim(left = 1969, right = 2011)
```

### # Remove the label of the x-axis

```
fte_graph.xaxis.label.set_visible(False)
```

### # The signature bar

```
fte_graph.text(x = 1965.8, y = -7,
    s = ' @DATAQUEST Source: National Center for Education 5
```

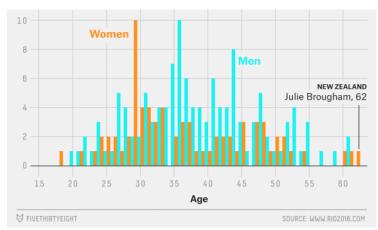


The x and y coordinates of the text snippet added were found through a process of trial and error. You can pass in floats to the x and y parameters, so you'll be able to control the position of the text with a high level of precision. It's also worth mentioning that we tweaked the positioning of the signature bar in such a way that we added some visually refreshing lateral margins (we discussed this adjustment earlier). To increase the left margin, we simply lowered the value of the x-coordinate. To increase the right one, we added more whitespace characters between the author's name and the source's name – this pushes the source's name to the right, which results in adding the desired margin.

# A different kind of signature bar

You'll also meet a slightly different kind of signature bar:





Source: FiveThirtyEight This kind of signature bar can be replicated quite easily as well. We'll just add some grey colored text, and a line right above it. We'll create the visual effect of a line by adding a snippet of text of multiple underscore characters ("\_"). You might wonder why we're not using axhline() to simply draw a horizontal line at the y-coordinate we want. We don't do that because the new line will drag down the entire grid of the graph, and this won't create the desired effect. We could also try adding an arrow, and then remove the pointer so we end up with a line. However, the "underscore" solution is much simpler. In the next code block, we implement what we've just discussed. The methods and parameters we use here should already be familiar from earlier sections.

Days

Hours

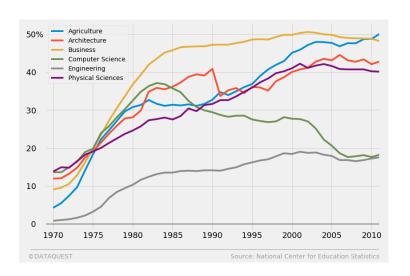
Minutes

Seconds

```
fte_graph.set_yticklabels(labels = [-10, '0 ', '10 ', '2
fte_graph.axhline(y = 0, color = 'black', linewidth = 1.3, a
fte_graph.xaxis.label.set_visible(False)
fte_graph.set_xlim(left = 1969, right = 2011)

# The other signature bar
fte_graph.text(x = 1967.1, y = -6.5,
    s = '______
color = 'grey', alpha = .7)

fte_graph.text(x = 1966.1, y = -9,
    s = ' @DATAQUEST
    fontsize = 14, color = 'grey', alpha = .7)
```



### Adding a title and subtitle

If you examine

Days Hours Minutes Seconds

graph. The title is almost never technical, and it usually expresses a single, simple idea. It's also almost never emotionally-neutral. In the Fandango graph above, we can see a simple, "emotionally-active" title ("Fandango LOVES Movies"), and not a bland "The distribution of various movie rating types".

- The subtitle offers technical information about the graph. This
  information is what makes axis labels redundant oftentimes. We
  should be careful to customize our subtitle accordingly since
  we've already dropped the x-axis label.
- Visually, the title and the subtitle have different font weights, and they are left-aligned (unlike most titles, which are centered). Also, they are aligned vertically with the major tick labels of the y-axis, as we showed earlier.

Let's now add a title and a subtitle to our graph while being mindful of the above observations. In the code block below, we'll build upon what we've coded so far, and we will:

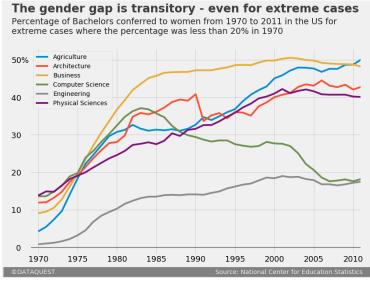
Add a title and a subtitle by using the same text() method we used to add text in the signature bar. If you already have some experience with matplotlib, you might wonder why we don't use the title() and suptitle() methods. This is because these two methods have an awful functionality with regard to moving text with precision. The only new parameter for text() is weight. We use it to bold the title.

START FREE →

```
START FREE →
```

```
fte_graph.set_yticklabels(labels = [-10, '0 ', '10 ', '2
fte_graph.axhline(y = 0, color = 'black', linewidth = 1.3, a
fte_graph.xaxis.label.set_visible(False)
fte_graph.set_xlim(left = 1969, right = 2011)
fte_graph.text(x = 1965.8, y = -7,
    s = ' @DATAQUEST
    fontsize = 14, color = '#f0f0f0', backgroundcolor = 'green's part of the properties of the properties
```

### # Adding a title and a subtitle



In case you were wondering, the font used in the original FTE graphs is Decima Mono, a paywalled font. For this reason, we'll stick with Matplotlib's default font, which looks pretty similar anyway.

### friendly colors

Right now, we have that clunky, rectangular legend. We'll get rid of it, and add colored labels near each plot line. Each line will have a certain color, and a word of an identical color will name the Bachelor which that line corresponds to. First, however, we'll modify the default colors of the plot lines, and add

### colorblind-friendly colors:

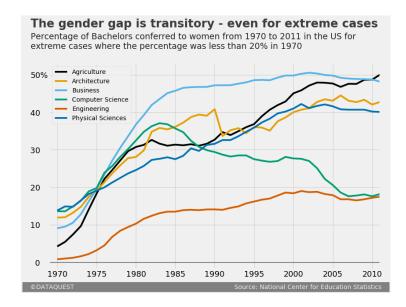
Color	Color name	RGB (1-255)	<b>CMYK (%)</b>	P	D
	Black	0, 0, 0	0, 0, 0, 100		
	Orange	230, 159, 0	0, 50, 100, 0		
i i	Sky blue	86, 180, 233	80, 0, 0, 0		
H	Bluish green	0, 158, 115	97, 0, 75, 0		
	Yellow	240, 228, 66	10, 5, 90, 0		1.0
	Blue	0, 114, 178	100, 50, 0, 0		
li e	Vermillion	213, 94, 0	0, 80, 100, 0		
	Reddish purple	204, 121, 167	10, 70, 0, 0		

Source: Points of View: Color blindness by Bang Wong We'll compile a list of RGB parameters for colorblind-friendly colors by using values from the above image. As a side note, we avoid using yellow because text snippets with that color are not easily readable on the graph's dark grey background color. After compiling this list of RGB parameters, we'll then pass it to the color parameter of the plot() method we used in our previous code. Note that matplotlib will require the RGB parameters to be within a 0-1 range, so we'll divide every value by 255, the maximum RGB value. We won't bother dividing the zeros because 0/255 = 0.

### # The previous code we modify

fte\_graph = women\_majors.plot(x = 'Year', y = under\_20.inde)

### # The previous code that remains the same



### style by adding colored labels

Finally, we add colored labels to each plot line by using the

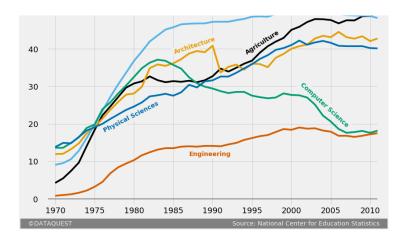
text() method used earlier. The only new parameter is rotation, which we use to rotate each label so that it fits elegantly on the graph. We'll also do a little trick here, and make the grid lines transparent around labels by simply modifying their background color to match that of the graph. In our previous code we only modify the plot() method by setting the legend parameter to False.

This will get us rid of the default legend. We also skip redeclaring the colors list since it's already stored in memory from the previous cell.

### **START FREE** →

### # The previous code that remains unchanged

### # Add colored labels



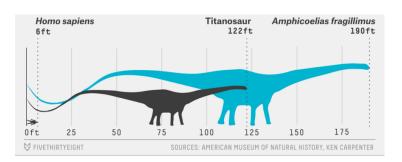
### Next steps

That's it, our graph is now ready for publication! To do a short recap, we've started with generating a graph with matplotlib's default style. We then brought that graph to "FTE-level" through a series of steps:

- We used matplotlib's in-built fivethirtyeight style.
- We added a title and a subtitle, and customized each.
- We added a signature bar.
- We removed the default legend, and added colored labels.
- We made a series of other small adjustments: customizing the tick labels, bolding the horizontal line at y = 0, adding a vertical grid line near the tick labels, removing the label of the x-axis, and increasing the lateral margins of the y-axis.

To build upon what you've learned, here are a few next steps to consider:

- Generate a similar graph for other Bachelors.
- Generate different kinds of FTE graphs: a histogram, a scatter plot etc.



Source: FiveThirtyEight

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### Alex Olteanu

Alex is a content author at Dataquest and writes courses on statistics and Python.

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